

The Late Anglo-Saxon Royal Agent: The Identity and Function of
English Ealdormen and Bishops c. 950-1066

Mary Elizabeth Blanchard



Faculty of History

Mansfield College, University of Oxford

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of D.Phil in History

Hilary Term 2016

Short Abstract

This thesis examines the identities and functions of late Anglo-Saxon royal agents (c. 950-1066), focusing on bishops and ealdormen. To establish who royal agents were, the thesis explores the family relationships among the leading men in the ecclesiastical and secular spheres, especially those linking men administering ealdordoms to the senior clergy. It also examines the offices of royal agents in late Anglo-Saxon England and argues that the duties of ecclesiastical and secular officials were not fundamentally different.

While traceable kin networks appear among senior clerics and among high secular officials, few familial links connect the senior clergy to ealdormen. Thus, this thesis divides these kin-groups into those who gained secular offices, 'lay families', and those who sought power through the ecclesiastical positions, 'church families'. The analysis of the strategies adopted by 'lay families' and 'church families' to secure and maintain political power indicates how the aristocracy served both the king and their own ambitions in the governance of late Anglo-Saxon England. Although these royal agents came from different family groups, their obligations as royal agents appear remarkably similar with the exception of their military functions. This information provides a better understanding of the pool of men from whom English kings generally chose their officials, how rulers may have kept this group from becoming too small, and what was expected of these royal agents.

The lack of (recorded) nepotism across episcopal and secular lines provides a more nuanced understanding of the aristocracy in Anglo-Saxon England. Furthermore, by offering an examination of both the identities and the functions of royal agents, this thesis provides a better understanding of the late Anglo-Saxon kingdom and its administration. In addition it creates a clearer picture of the aristocracy, the king, and the Church as well as the relationships between all three.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	iii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iv
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	v
Introduction	1
1	Episcopal Identity and Preferment in the Dioceses of Canterbury, Winchester, and Worcester 25
	The Bishop's Place in Society 27
	The Episcopal Duties of a Bishop 32
	Priests in the Royal Household 35
	Canterbury 36
	Worcester 44
	Winchester 55
	Non-English Comparisons 63
	Conclusion 67
2	Appointment to High Secular Office c. 950-1066 72
	Location 75
	System of Appointments 80
	Some Similarities and Differences 98
	Merit 101
	Merit mixed with Lineage Based Ealdormen 116
	Royal Reeves 118
	Non-English Comparisons 121
	Conclusion 125

3	Royal Assemblies and National Duties	132
	Royal Itineration	134
	The Royal Assemblies	136
	Duties Concerning Foreigners	145
	Duties Concerning the English	149
	Conclusion	158
4	Duties on the Local Level and Units of Administration	160
	Secular Units of Governance—Shires and Hundreds	163
	Ecclesiastical Units of Governance—Dioceses and Parishes	167
	The Office of Ealdorman	176
	The Office of Bishop	189
	The Office of Reeve	199
	Other Public Affairs—Ealdormen, Bishops, and Reeves	214
	Conclusion	219
5	Military Obligations of Royal Agents	222
	The Three Orders in England—Moving from the Theoretical to the Concrete	223
	The Common Burdens	232
	Acts of Military Defence and Acts of Military Aggression	249
	Conclusion	264
	Conclusion	267
	Bibliography	274

List of Figures

Figure 1: Archbishops of Canterbury c. 950-c. 1050	vii
Figure 2: Bishops of Worcester c. 950-c. 1050	viii
Figure 3: Bishops of Winchester c. 950-c. 1050	ix
Figure 4: Upward Movement in Attestations of Charters	ix
Figure 5: The Family of Æthelstan ‘Half-King’	x
Figure 6: The Family of Ælfhere of Mercia	x
Figure 7: The Family of Æthelweard the Chronicler	xi
Figure 8: The Family of Leofwine of Mercia	xii
Figure 9: The Family of Godwine	xiii

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been completed without the patience and generosity of many people. I am grateful to the fellows and staff at Mansfield College whose friendly and unending support created such a wonderful atmosphere during my time in Oxford. Particular thanks are given to Helen Lacey and Ros Ballaster who helped me navigate the graduate system.

Above all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Sarah Foot. She provided immeasurable advice, encouragement, and assistance through several unexpected turns as this thesis took shape. Any remaining errors are my own. Many thanks also go to Katie Har for her comments and advice on Anglo-Saxon legal history.

Lastly, I would like to thank Jacob Blanchard for his unending patience with lists of Old English names and unquestioning support throughout the entire thesis. Thank you for never driving me from our flat as Bishop Æthelwold did to the secular clerics at Winchester in 964.

List of Abbreviations

ASC	<i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> MS A: <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i>, Vol. 3: MS A, ed. J. M. Bately (Cambridge, 1986). MS C: <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i>, Vol. 5: MS C, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge, 2001). MS D: <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i>, Vol. 6: MS D, ed. G.P. Cubbin (Cambridge, 1996). MS E: <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i>, Vol. 7: MS E, ed. S. Irvine (Cambridge, 2004). Translations are based on <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation</i>, trans. D. Whitelock, D.C. Douglas, and S.I. Tucker (London, 1961).
AS Charters	<i>Anglo-Saxon Charters</i> , ed. A.J. Robertson (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1956).
Asser	<i>Life of King Alfred: Together with the Annals of Saint Neots erroneously ascribed to Asser</i> , ed. W.H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904; reprinted with an introductory essay by D. Whitelock, 1959); trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, <i>Alfred the Great and Other Contemporary Sources</i> (Harmondsworth, 1983).
Chron. Rames.	<i>Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis</i> , ed. W. D. Macray (London, 1886).
Crawford	<i>The Crawford Collection of Early Charters and Documents Now in the Bodleian Library</i> , ed. and trans. Arthur S. Napier and William Henry Stevenson (Oxford, 1895).
C&S	<i>Councils & Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church A.D. 871-1204</i> , ed. D. Whitelock, M. Brett, and C.N.L. Brooke (Oxford, 1981).
EEE	Bede, 'Epistola ad Ecgbertum Episcopum' in <i>Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow</i> , ed. and trans. C. Grocock and I.N. Wood (Oxford, 2013).
EHD	<i>English Historical Documents I, c. 500-1042</i> , ed. D. Whitelock (2 nd edn, London, 1979).
GR	William of Malmesbury, <i>Gesta Regum Anglorum</i> , ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, R. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom, (Oxford, 1998).
HE	<i>Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> , ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1993).

JW	<i>The Chronicle of John of Worcester</i> II, ed. and trans. R.R. Darlington (Oxford, 1995).
Hemingi	Hemingus, <i>Chartularium Ecclesiae Wigorniensis</i> , ed. Thomas Hearne, 2 vols (Oxford, 1723).
Keynes, Atlas	S. Keynes, <i>An Atlas of Attestations in Anglo-Saxon Charters, c. 670-1066</i> (Cambridge, 2002).
Keynes, Diplomas	S. Keynes, <i>The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready'</i> (Cambridge, 1980).
LE	<i>Liber Eliensis</i> , ed. E.O. Blake (London: 1962).
DB	<i>Domesday Book</i>
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
PASE	<i>Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
S	P.H. Sawyer, <i>Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography</i> (London, 1968), revised S. E. Kelly, <i>The Electronic Sawyer</i> , accessed at < http://esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html >. Charters are cited by number only.
VSÆ	Wulfstan of Winchester, <i>The Life of St Æthelwold</i> , ed. and trans. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1991).
VSD	<i>The Early Lives of St Dunstan</i> , ed. and trans. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 2011).
VSO	Byrhtferth of Ramsey, <i>The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgbwine</i> , ed. and trans. M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2009).
Wills	<i>Anglo-Saxon Wills</i> , ed. D. Whitelock (Cambridge, 1930).
Writs	<i>Anglo-Saxon Writs</i> , ed. F. Harmer (2nd edn, Stamford, 1989).

Figure 1: Archbishops of Canterbury c. 950-c. 1050

Name	Years	Previous Positions
<i>Oda</i>	941-June 958	Royal priest (?); Bishop of Ramsbury
<i>Ælfsige</i>	958-959	Bishop of Winchester
<i>Byrthelm</i>	959, deposed 959, died 15 May 973	Bishop of Wells*
<i>Dunstan</i>	959-988	Royal priest (?); Abbot of Glastonbury; Bishop of Worcester, Bishop of London
<i>Æthelgar</i>	988-Feb. 990	Abbot of New Minster, Winchester; Bishop of Selsey
<i>Sigeric</i>	990-Oct. 994	Abbot of St. Augustine's, Canterbury; Bishop of Ramsbury
<i>Ælfric</i>	995-16 Nov. 1005	Abbot of St. Albans; Bishop of Ramsbury
<i>Ælfheah</i>	1006-19 April 1012	Abbot of Bath; Bishop of Winchester
<i>Lyfing (Ælfstan)</i>	1013-12 June 1020	Abbot of Chertsey; Bishop of Wells
<i>Æthelnoth</i>	13 Nov. 1020-Oct. or Nov. 1038	Dean of Christ Church, Canterbury
<i>Eadsige</i>	1038-29 Oct. 1050	Bishop of St. Martin's, Canterbury

*William of Malmesbury claims this Byrthelm was a monk at Glastonbury before his episcopal appointment. (*The Early History of Glastonbury*, ed J. Scott (Woodbridge, 1981), pp. 138-9.)

Figure 2: Bishops of Worcester c. 950-c. 1050

Name	Years	Previous and Concurrent Positions
<i>Cenwald</i>	928x929-? 28 June 957 or 958	Royal priest (?)
<i>Dunstan</i>	?957-959	Royal priest (?); Abbot of Glastonbury; Bishop of London (concurrently with Worcester)
<i>Oswald</i>	961-29 Feb. 992, appointed to York in 971 but retained Worcester, died 992	-----
<i>Ealdwulf</i>	992-4 June 1005, appointed to York in 995 but retained Worcester, died 1005	Abbot of Peterborough; Archbishop of York (concurrently with Worcester)
<i>Wulfstan I</i>	1002-1016, appointed to York in 1002, retained Worcester until forced to resign in 1016, died in 1023	Bishop of London; Archbishop of York (concurrently with Worcester)
<i>Leofsig</i>	1016-19 Aug. 1033	Abbot of Thorney
<i>Brihtheah</i>	1033-20 Dec. 1038	Abbot of Pershore
<i>Lyfing</i>	1038-1040 deprived of Worcester	Abbot of Tavistock; Bishop of Crediton (concurrently with Worcester); Bishop of Cornwall (concurrently with Worcester)
<i>Ælfric Puttoc</i>	1040-1041	Archbishop of York (concurrently with Worcester)
<i>Lyfing</i>	(restored) 1041-20, 24 or 25 March 1046	Abbot of Tavistock; Bishop of Crediton (concurrently with Worcester); Bishop of Cornwall (concurrently with Worcester)
<i>Ealdred</i>	1046-1062, died 1069	Abbot of Tavistock; Bishop of Ramsbury 1056-58 (concurrently with Worcester); Bishop of Hereford, 1056-1060 (concurrently with Worcester); Archbishop of York 1061-1069 (concurrently with Worcester 1061-2)

Figure 3: Bishops of Winchester c. 950-c. 1050

<u>Names</u>	<u>Years</u>	<u>Previous and Concurrent Positions</u>
<i>Ælfheah I</i>	934 or 935-12 March 951	Royal priest and monk (?)
<i>Ælfsige I</i>	951-958	-----
<i>Brihthelm</i>	958-963	Royal priest (?); Bishop of Selsey
<i>Æthelwold I</i>	29 Nov. 963-1 Aug 984	Royal priest (?); Abbot of Abingdon
<i>Ælfheah II</i>	28 Oct. 984-1006	Abbot of Bath
<i>Cenwulf</i>	1006	Abbot of Peterborough
<i>Æthelwold II</i>	1006x1007-1012x1013	-----
<i>Ælfsige II</i>	1012x1013-1032	-----
<i>Ælfwine</i>	1032-29 Aug. 1047	Royal priest of Cnut
<i>Stigand</i>	1047-1070, appointed to Canterbury in 1052, retained Winchester, deprived of both 1070	Royal priest of Cnut; bishop of Elmham; Archbishop of Canterbury (concurrently with Winchester)

Figure 4: Upward Movement in Attestations of Charters

<u>Name</u>	<u>Transferred from</u>	<u>Transferred to</u>	<u>Rank Numbers</u>
<i>Æthelgar</i>	Selsey	Canterbury	Between 4 th -12 th , third last at 5 th , last 2 at 3 rd
<i>Sigeric</i>	Ramsbury	Canterbury	Between 5 th -8 th , second to last 8 th , last 4 th
<i>Ælfric</i>	Ramsbury	Canterbury	First at 4 th , others between 5 th -8 th , second to last at 8 th , last at 4 th
<i>Oswald</i>	Worcester	York	Occasionally witnessed at 2 nd (1x) or 3 rd but generally appears at 5 th -7 th . Of last nine as Worcester, between 6 th -10 th ; last one was at 4 th
<i>Ealdwulf</i>	Worcester	York	3 as Worcester, 11 th (2x) and the last was 5 th

Figure 5: The Family of Æthelstan ‘Half-King’

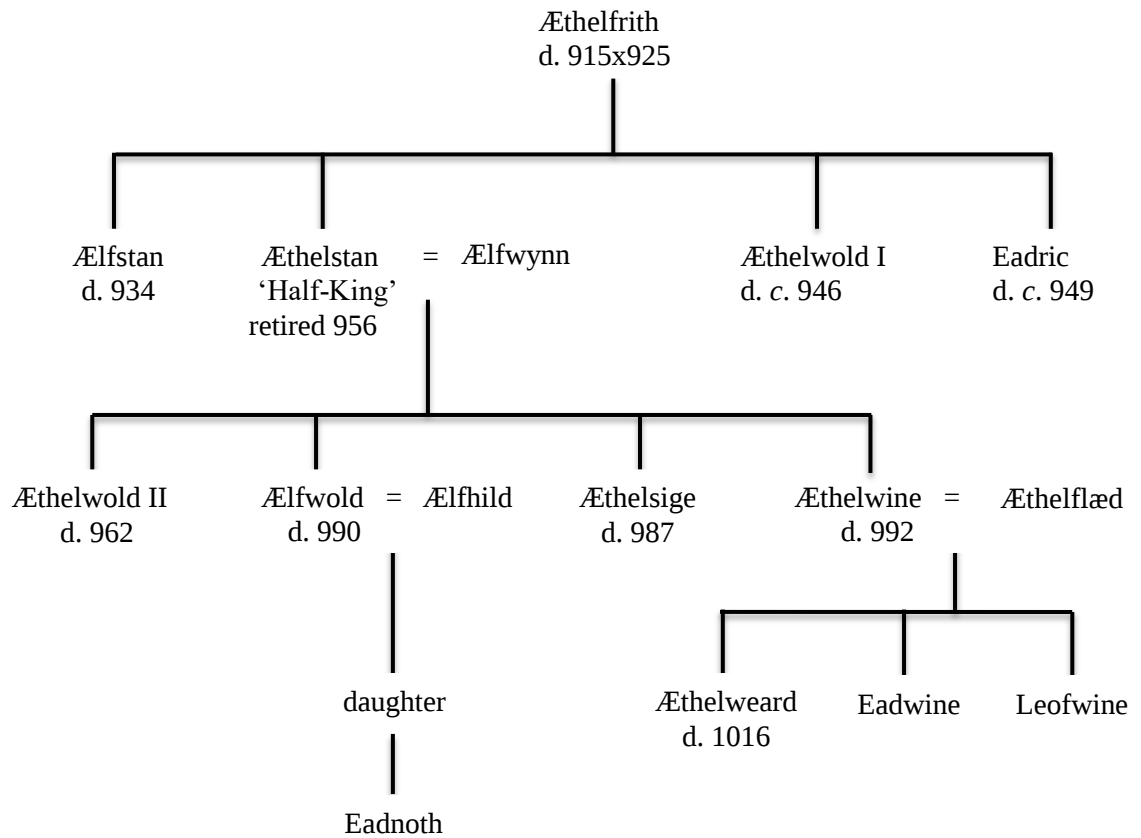


Figure 6: The Family of Ælfhere of Mercia

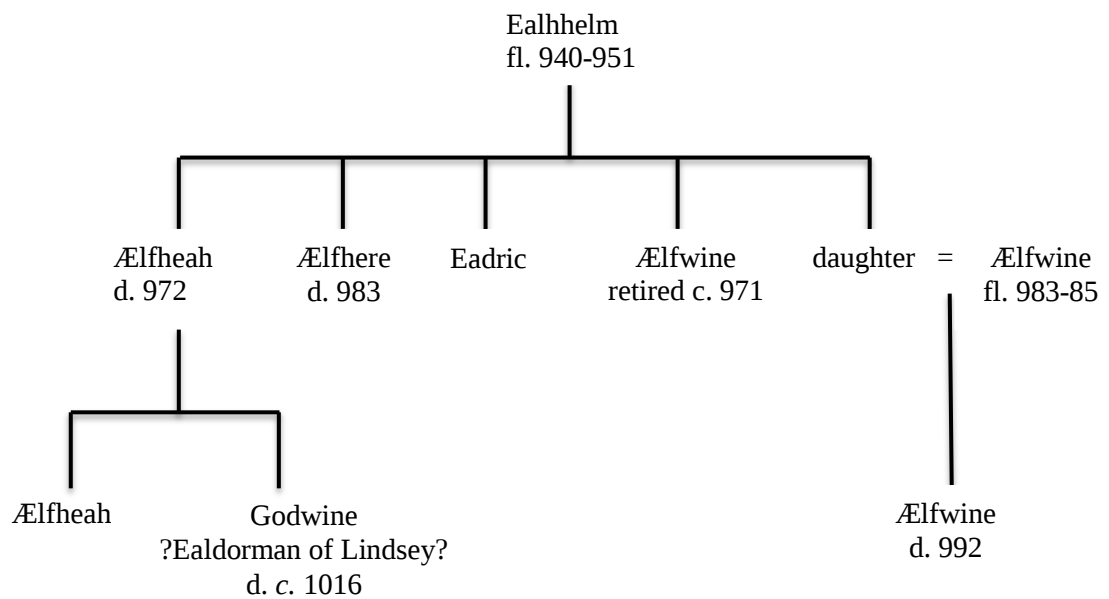


Figure 7: The Family of Æthelweard the Chronicler

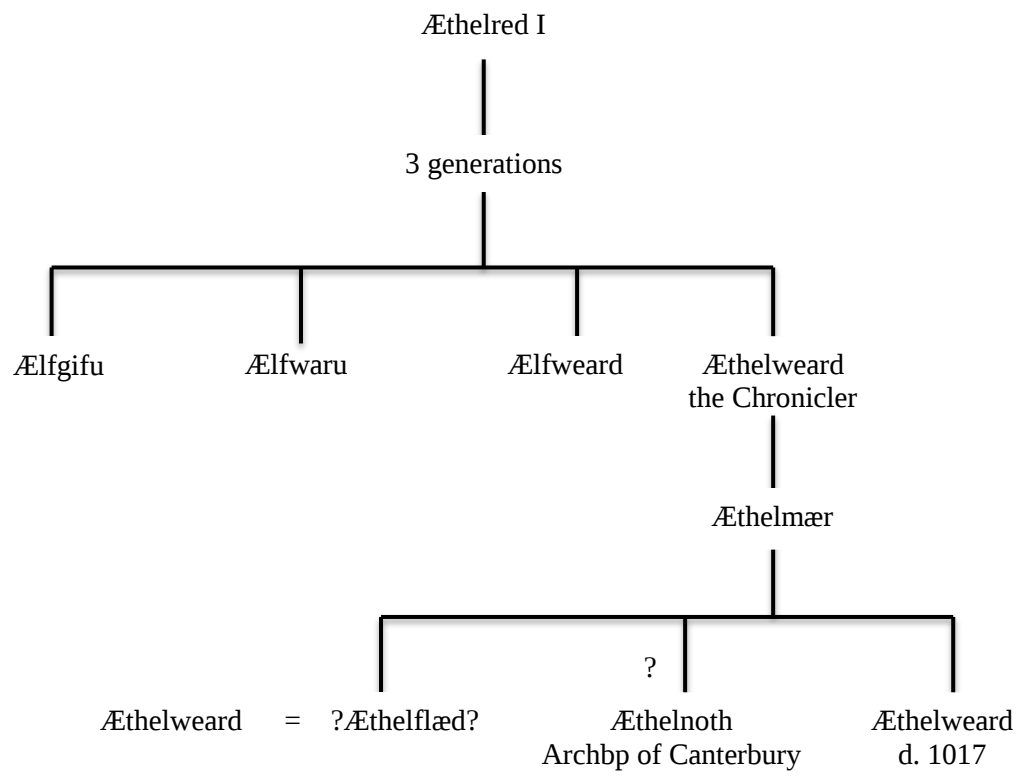


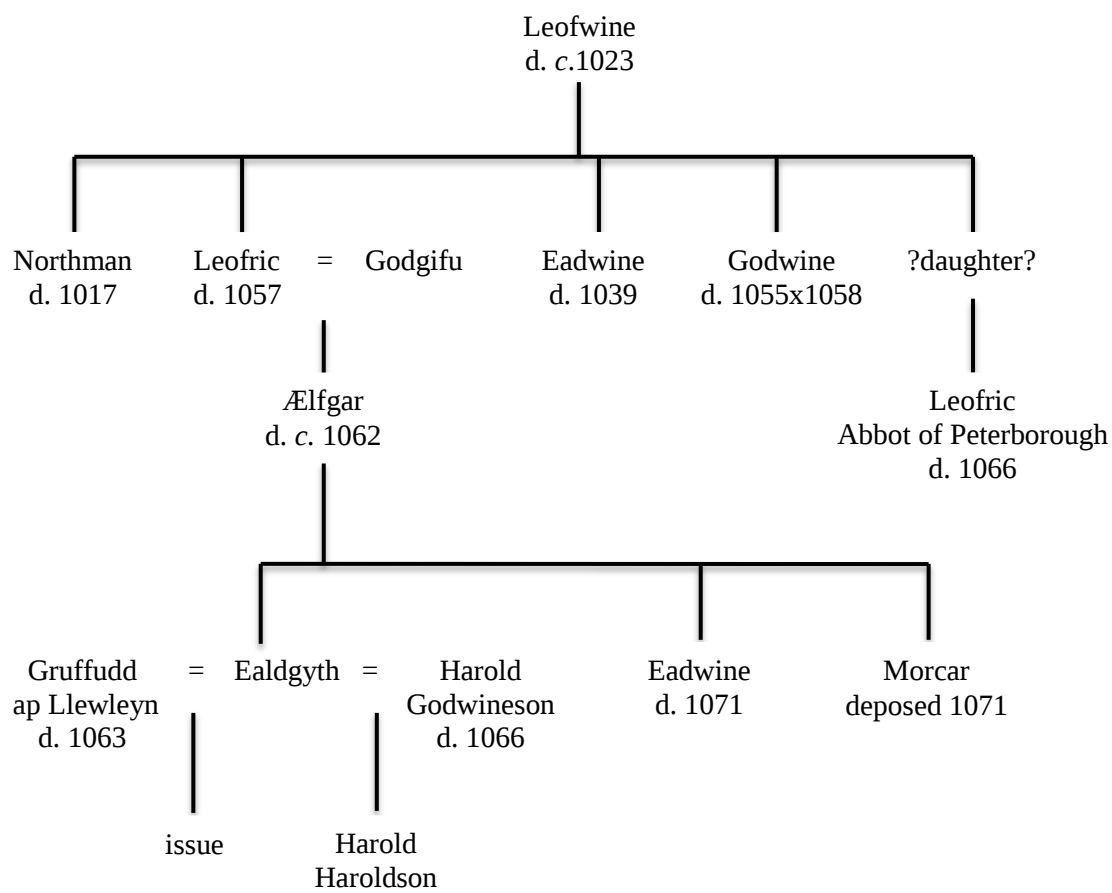
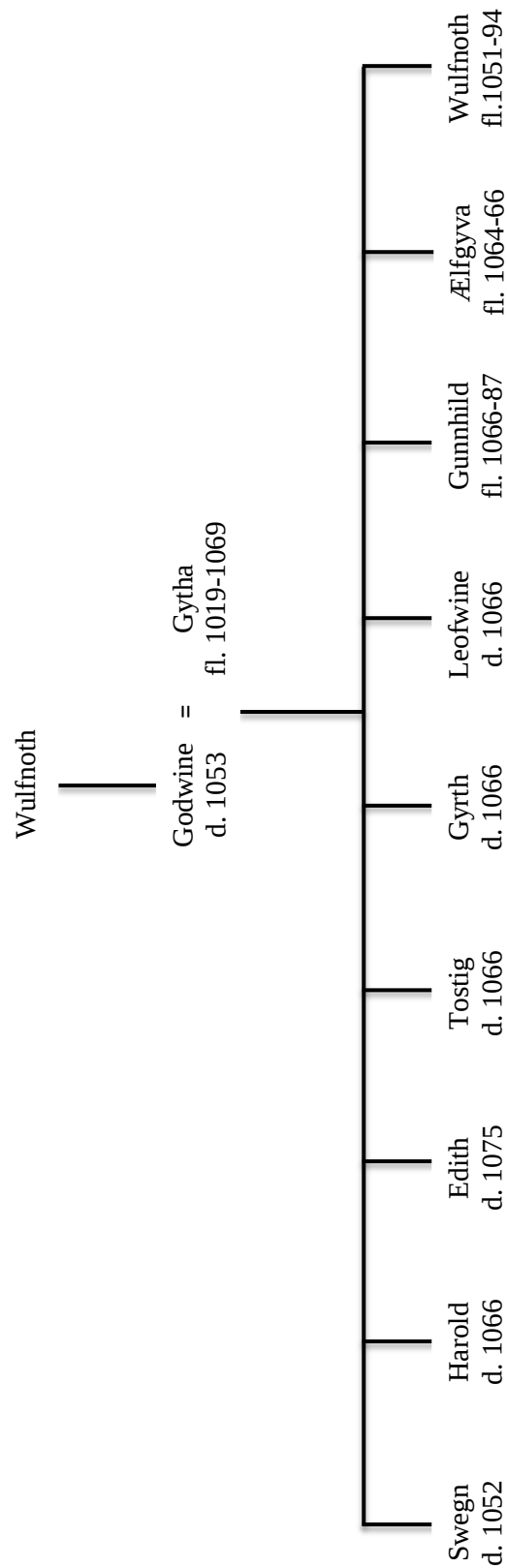
Figure 8: The Family of Leofwine of Mercia

Figure 9: The Family of Godwine



Introduction

In 946 King Edmund unexpectedly died, stabbed fatally at Pucklechurch (Glos), and his brother, Eadred, immediately succeeded him as ruler of the English. Although Æthelstan, the older half-brother of the new ruler, had completed the unification of the English peoples under the West Saxon dynasty in the 920s and 930s, Eadred's succession would prove the last smooth transition between Anglo-Saxon kings. The expansion of the West Saxon kingdom during the early tenth century had led to the annexation of the truncated Mercian realm and the subjugation of the east midlands and the northern Danish kingdom centred on York. Governing this expanded kingdom required the West Saxon kings to make more extensive use of their royal agents, both ealdormen (later earls) and bishops, in order to ensure that royal policy extended to all areas of the realm. We may question how uniformly they succeeded in that ambition given the political and social diversity of the individual regions across England. While the whole population nominally belonged to the kingdom of the English, regional interests and loyalties persisted as is demonstrated by several succession crises in which the kingdom was split between two claimants along the borders of older Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. We will start with these succession crises as they provide a good overview of the overarching political situations within which royal agents worked. Only after a broad picture of the late Anglo-Saxon kingdom has been painted will it be possible to study royal agents, whose identity and functions are the subject of this thesis.

Eadred's nephew Eadwig succeeded him in 955 but his behaviour, policies, and changes to the composition of the body of royal agents appear to have turned many of these officials against him. Within two years Eadwig's younger brother, Edgar, was declared king of Mercia and set up his own court with his own royal agents north of the

Thames. Among the men at the northern court were the future archbishop of Canterbury, Dunstan, the sons of Ealdorman Æthelstan ‘Half-King’, and Ælfhere, ealdorman of Mercia. The Half-King’s sons and Ælfhere would become powerful figures under Edgar, particularly after Eadwig’s death in 959 which allowed for the reunification of the English kingdom. The rivalry between these two families would help shape politics during the reign of Edgar (959-975) and that of his son Æthelred *Unræd* (978-1016).

Recognized for its stability, hence his nickname ‘the Peaceable’, Edgar’s reign strengthened royal authority across England, possibly through the introduction of the shire-reeve; his reign also saw the promotion of a wholesale revolution in monastic observance—generally referred to now as the tenth-century reform. Not only senior clergymen such as Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester, Archbishop Oswald of York, and Archbishop Dunstan fostered the movement; the support of the king and queen and of many of the king’s ealdormen proved crucial to its success. For example, Ealdorman Æthelwine of East Anglia worked closely with Archbishop Oswald in the foundation of Ramsey Abbey. The monastic reform proved successful in the south of the island but hardly spread into the north. The lack of northern acceptance of the reform monastic ideals may have been partially because of regional independence and distance from the king’s court, but much of it appears to have been because of the wealth of the southern churches. Besides promoting the reform, Edgar also appointed many of its members and their protégés to the Anglo-Saxon episcopate.

While many of Edgar’s royal agents appear to have worked well together during his reign, these officials split after his death over the issue of succession. As with the division of the kingdom in 957, royal agents grouped themselves behind one of Edgar’s sons, Edward or Æthelred. The dispute over who was the legitimate heir offers some useful insights, both on how political issues could divide royal officials and the networks they had formed among themselves. It is possible to see bishops and ealdormen on both

sides of the issue. While Edgar's elder son, Edward, was eventually crowned king, his murder in 978 just three years after his succession kept the kingdom from the possibility of splitting but also gave Æthelred's reign an inauspicious start. His rule was additionally troubled by the renewal of Viking attacks in the 980s culminating in the eventual invasions of Sweyn Forkbeard and his son, Cnut. Furthermore, Æthelred twice restructured his court and the body of royal agents, but appeared unable to appoint sufficient effective and trustworthy ealdormen. Additionally, multiple secular royal agents were exiled, mutilated, or outright killed with the king's knowledge if not outright encouragement. Both of these factors coupled with increasing pressure of the Viking attacks caused political upheaval particularly in the second half of his reign. In 1013, Æthelred fled the kingdom in the face of Sweyn Forkbeard's successful invasion. Sweyn's death the next year allowed the leading men among the English, Æthelred's royal agents, to invite the king back, albeit with some conditions attached to his return to power. The last year of Æthelred's reign involved a second Viking invasion under Cnut, the king's own militarily-frustrated heir, Edmund Ironside, attempting to defend the kingdom against the Danish and the treachery of Eadric Streona, ealdorman of Mercia. Æthelred died in the spring of 1016. Edmund Ironside succeeded his father but was unable to drive Cnut from the English kingdom; the new Anglo-Saxon king died seven months after Æthelred. Before his death, Edmund had signed a treaty with Cnut to divide the kingdom along the old divisional lines used in previous decisions to split the English realm and this allowed Cnut to proclaim himself king over all of England.

Æthelred's sanctioned mutilation or murder of several of his ealdormen and the deaths in battle of many other royal agents, including clergymen, allowed Cnut to appoint many of his own officials immediately. These new royal agents were 'new men' and thus loyal to the Cnut and not the scattered heirs of the West Saxon line. Although Danish nobles appear to have dominated secular positions in the early years of Cnut's reign, the

Danish conqueror relied heavily on his Anglo-Saxon bishops, many of whom came from the second generation of reformed clergy. Archbishop Wulfstan proved particularly influential, writing many of Cnut's law-codes. By the time of his death in 1035, Cnut's royal agents, both secular and ecclesiastical, were English. Cnut was responsible for Leofwine of Mercia continuing to serve at the rank of ealdorman and for the appointment of Earl Godwin to Wessex. These men and their families would dominate the secular royal agent positions until the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. The amount of power Cnut gave to Earl Godwin as his reign progressed can be argued to have laid the seeds for the demise of Anglo-Saxon England.

These two families aligned themselves on opposite sides during the succession dispute that occurred between Cnut's two sons, Harthacnut and Harold; political parties that again split along political networks rather than vocational ones. Harold's unexpected death in 1040 put an end to the dispute but Harthacnut's equally unanticipated death two years later led to the return of the House of Wessex in the person of Edward the Confessor, Æthelred's son. Edward had been living in exile in Normandy since his father's death in 1013. The political situation under Edward the Confessor was complicated. The families of Godwin and Leofwine were too entrenched for the new king to remove and he was thus forced to ally himself with one; Edward chose Godwine, marrying the earl's daughter and providing his two oldest sons with small earldoms within the first years of his reign. Vacancies in secular positions were filled by the sons of both families, although Edward did on occasion use his royal authority to punish some of these royal agents through exile. In fact, in 1051 he exiled the entire Godwinson family for a time, but they were restored the following year.

Although Edward could not make a huge impact on the secular royal agents he did leave his mark on the senior clergy. Going against the trend established by his grandfather Edgar and continued by all his successors, Edward the Confessor did not appoint monks

to the vacant episcopal positions but elevated men from the secular clergy. His death without a clear heir only served to increase the political tension. The invasions of Harald Harðráði and William the Conqueror in 1066 depleted the secular Anglo-Saxon officials who were replaced by the Conqueror's followers. The ecclesiastical royal agents survived the Conquest but were purged by William I in 1070 and also supplanted by many Norman clerics.

THE SCOPE OF THIS THESIS

Now that we have established the broad framework of the later Anglo-Saxon period we can turn to the questions at the heart of this thesis: the identity and familial connections of the royal agents charged with extending royal authority to all regions of the English kingdom and the specific duties that they were expected to fulfil in those roles. In that enquiry we will further analyse family strategies for gaining royal preferment to secular and ecclesiastical high office. Having established the identity of the late Anglo-Saxon royal agents, the sorts of family connections they had with other agents, and the means by which they achieved their high office, we will discuss what these officials were meant to do as servants of the king both in his presence and away from court in their own localities.

Although many of the large political and religious changes discussed above occurred concurrently in the final century of the Anglo-Saxon period, historians habitually separate ecclesiastical from lay royal agents. Particularly, bishops have continually been analysed isolated from their recognized secular equivalents, ealdormen. To a certain extent this is an understandable practice as, by nature of their office, prelates had additional ecclesiastical duties which ealdormen would never have been assigned and secular leaders had duties which Canon law forbade all ordained clergy. But previous scholarship, while giving modern historians a good basis for understanding the Anglo-

Saxon aristocracy and the Anglo-Saxon episcopate, has created a dichotomy between lay and ecclesiastical office holders which close study of the sources does not always maintain.

Before we start our discussion of the late Anglo-Saxon royal agent, I would like to point out one final issue. Although its geographical isolation from the mainland of Europe did produce certain eccentricities, we cannot speak of Anglo-Saxon England as if it existed in a vacuum. A brief survey of the research done on Carolingian and Ottonian high-ranking men and their families reveals that neither the makeup of the Anglo-Saxons aristocracy nor their relationship with their kings was entirely unique.¹ Research by many German historians show a fluidity among the ninth- and tenth-century Frankish office holders just as we see in the tenth- and eleventh-century English aristocracy examined here. In other words, the establishment of entrenched families in certain regions with specific titles who may have controlled these localities at least semi-independently is a cross-cultural phenomenon of the High Middle Ages not the early medieval period. As we will see in this thesis, the Anglo-Saxon high aristocracy was a small but not closed group concerned with gaining or maintaining royal favour—called *Königsnähe* in studies on German nobles—in order to obtain lands and appointments. This English class also demonstrate a mixture of blood and merit as entry points into the king's circle of officials, something also found among the Carolingians and Ottonians. There are of course differences in these cultures and the limited geographical scope of England compared to Charlemagne's empire or even Western and Eastern Francia must be factored in when making comparisons of these aristocracies and their rulers. I maintain a focus on late

¹ See *The Medieval Nobility: Studies on the Ruling Classes of France and Germany from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century*, ed. T. Reuter (Amsterdam, 1979), particularly chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6; K. Leyser, *Medieval Germany and its Neighbours, 900-1250* (London, 1982), chapters 1, 4, and 7; K. Leyser, *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: the Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries*, trans. T. Reuter (London, 1994), chapters 5, 10-12; T. Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages c. 800-1056* (London, 1991), particularly Part III; and *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations*, ed. A. Duggan (Woodbridge, 2000), chapters 1, 3-6.

Anglo-Saxon aristocracy throughout my thesis but at times I will pause for brief comparisons to officials in non-English kingdoms.

TERMINOLOGY

For clarity, a brief discussion of certain terms used in this thesis is necessary. First, any lay magnate appointed the head of an area before Cnut's reign (1017-1035) will be called 'ealdorman' and his official sphere of influence an 'ealdordom'. After 1017 these men will be called 'earls' and their areas of administration 'earldoms'. I will not prove an in-depth analysis of the differences in these terms as the change in title during Cnut's reign does not appear to have affected the nature of these offices' functions.²

Second, following Ann Williams, I will use the terms 'aristocrat' and 'aristocracy' to refer to the highest lay magnates and 'noble' and 'nobility' will only appear in quotations from other authors. As Williams points out, 'nobility' possesses nuances of legal privilege as well as a narrower definition whereas 'aristocracy' better indicates 'what contemporaries would have described as 'better men' (*optimates*) or 'chief men' (*proceres*), as distinguished from burgesses, freemen, peasants, and slaves.'³ It is these chief men who are the focus of this thesis and the fluidity of their station will be explored.

A third term which requires definition is the royal 'court'. Anglo-Saxon kings maintained neither capital nor permanent residence, although they do appear to have favoured certain areas over others. As with their European contemporaries they were itinerant kings. Therefore the royal court is not a location or even necessarily a consistent group. Within this thesis the 'court' is defined as the people who surrounded the itinerant king as he journeyed throughout his kingdom.

² For discussion of these issues see D. Crouch, *The Image of Aristocracy in Britain, 1000-1300* (London, 2005), pp. 36-37 and S. Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 74-75.

³ A. Williams, *The World before Domesday: the English Aristocracy 900-1066* (London, 2008), p. x.

Finally, as this thesis covers the period after the unification of the English kingdom the word national will occasionally appear. 'National', however, is a difficult word to use in the medieval context because it contains nuances and connotations that belong to later periods. For the purposes of this thesis, when 'national' appears it refers to activities and royal agents' duties which affected or influenced either the English kingdom as a whole or a significant part which stretched beyond one region.

NATURE OF THE SOURCES

This thesis originally started with the intent of searching out family connections among the great secular and ecclesiastical magnates of tenth- and eleventh-century England; it was to explore the extent to which nepotism aided in the advancement of kin-groups who held both senior clergymen and ealdormen positions. As a first step, a database of all the bishops in post in the period c. 950-1050 was created, into which was collected all the surviving evidence relating to each man and his family connections. Information from charters, wills, chronicles, later medieval histories and saints' *vitae* all proved valuable for shedding light on the activities and familial networks of the senior clergy and the high aristocracy particularly as they performed their duties as royal agents. Surprisingly the data collected indicates few documented familial connections between Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical and lay leaders. For example, the extant sources do not record a bishop as the brother to the local ealdorman. Rather, high-ranking lay leaders may well have intentionally kept their sons out of the church.⁴ A topic I will explore more thoroughly in this thesis within the larger examination of the identities and functions of royal agents in late Anglo-Saxon England (c. 950-1066). To limit scope of this study I will mainly focus on the highest-ranking agents, bishops and ealdormen or earls. The primary sources already mentioned provided much information on the identity of royal agents. An

⁴ C. Hart, 'Aethelstan 'Half-King' and his Family', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 2 (1973), 115-44; F. Barlow, *The Godwins: The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty* (Harlow, 2002); and Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*.

examination of charters, chronicles, and hagiographies, alongside royally issued law-codes also supplied answers for the second set of questions this thesis asks: the scope of a royal agent's duties.

A variety of sources are necessary in order to get the fullest picture possible of each royal agent as an individual and both the English episcopate and the high aristocracy as whole groups in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Both narrative and non-narrative sources help create a picture of the identities and functions of royal agents. The various versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* are an essential source of information but often the annals provide only the sparse details. For example, three versions of the *Chronicle* record the banishment of Ealdorman Leofsig in 1002 for killing the king's high reeve Æfic, but they provide no clue as to where he held office.⁵ Other narrative sources often provide more detail like saints' *vitae* and post-Conquest works such as the twelfth-century authors John of Worcester, William of Malmesbury, and the Peterborough chronicler, Hugh Candidus; John of Worcester is of particular interest since scholars believe he had access to pre-conquest texts which are now lost. The *Gesta abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, a fourteenth-century work also provides interesting, if somewhat suspect, details concerning the family ties of one of the bishops included in this discussion. These sources often provide more information on the ecclesiastical royal agents than their secular counterparts. A small number of narrative sources do focus on aristocratic families. They include the chronicle written by Ealdorman Æthelweard, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, and the *Vita Ædwardi*, which focuses on the Godwine family, but no extant source by itself provides enough information to analyse the lives and activities of the various leading lay magnates.⁶ Chronicles specific to certain houses, like the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*, also provide interesting, if at times, conflicting views of ealdormen and

⁵ ASC CDE s.a. 1002.

⁶ Æthelweard, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, A. Campbell (London, 1962); *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. and trans. A. Campbell (Cambridge, 1998); and F. Barlow, *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster* 2nd edn (Oxford, 1992).

earls, depending on if they acted as friend or enemy to that particular monastery and its founder.⁷ Similarly, the *Life* of Oswald consistently vilifies Ealdorman Ælfhere of Mercia while honouring his political rival Ealdorman Æthelwine of East Anglia. Yet, *vitae* by their nature do not provide a truly multi-dimensional figure even with their protagonists' lives. A final issue with the majority of these narrative sources lays in their patronage. Because texts like chronicles were written in monastic houses sometimes under royal patronage, they tend to focus more on the king and his clergy than on the secular leaders. Still ealdormen and reeves do appear in the annals and a picture—albeit a sometimes fuzzy one—does form of what they were doing as representatives of the king. To establish further information about the careers of the late Anglo-Saxon royal agents especially most of the high-ranking lay officials it is necessary to often turn to non-narrative sources like law-codes, royal and episcopal charters, royal writs, and wills.

Law-codes themselves can be complex documents to work with. They offer us the activities that the Anglo-Saxon kings wanted their royal agents to be performing; law-codes demonstrate that the rulers wanted to extend royal control to all parts of the English kingdom. Unfortunately, what the king and his councillors envisioned and what actually became implemented could be two very separate things, particularly the further away from the West Saxon heartlands one moves. For the most part, the law-codes taken by themselves promote an idea of uniformity across the kingdom that other primary sources do not support.

Besides law-codes, this thesis makes use of other royally issued documents, charters and writs. Royal writs provide information on duties of royal agents in the matters with which they dealt. They also supply the identity of various levels of royal agents by their addressees.⁸ The content of charters is important but for this thesis their

⁷ See *LE*.

⁸ See *Writs*, pp. 15-17 and 23-24 and R. Sharpe, 'The Use of Writs in the Eleventh Century', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2003), 247-91 (pp. 251-53). They can be helpful not only in identifying ealdormen but also reeves and sheriffs.

witness lists have proved more useful. For example, the placement of a specific bishop cannot be taken as concrete proof of royal favouritism or disfavour, as the case may be, the consistency of certain episcopal sees to be near the top of the witness lists provides an insight into the importance of these bishoprics in the eyes of their contemporaries.⁹ To continue with the earlier example of Ealdorman Leofsige, few of the charters he attested involve the ealdorman directly. Only the witness lists reveal his presence and a single document notes that he was ealdorman [*dux*] ‘of the East Saxons’.¹⁰ Witness lists also indicate how often a specific bishop or ealdorman attended the king.¹¹ Two main problems emerge, however, when examining the lists. First, the size of the lists themselves varies from document to document—a factor which may be dependent more on the whim of the clerk rather than the size of the gathering. Second, the inclusion of few secondary names, including nicknames and toponyms, do not make tracing Anglo-Saxon family connections easy. Particularly if the royal agent being traced had a common given name and members of his kin-group did as well, early careers can prove difficult if not impossible to piece together with confidence. The majority of Anglo-Saxon witness lists seem to put relatives close if not next to each other which is helpful when they can be confidently identified.¹²

The extant wills from the period can help with this issue by offering insights into the shapes of families. Not only useful for close kin, a will can provide some interesting

⁹ Canterbury and York are constantly first and second among any witnessing bishops. Other sees, including Worcester and Winchester, generally hold a consistent place in the lists but do vary for each bishop and between prelates.

¹⁰ See S 891: ‘Leofsige Orientalium-Saxonum dux.’

¹¹ Absence from the witness lists could be for a multitude of reasons, including distance from the meeting, a lack of money in order to travel, royal business elsewhere and possible royal disfavour. See V. King, ‘Ealdred, Archbishop of York: The Worcester Years’, in *Anglo-Norman Studies, XVIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1995*, ed. C. Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 123-38 (p. 134). King makes the point that Bishop Ealdred of Worcester’s greatest period of activity in his own diocese was 1051-1053 when he was probably in disfavour during the Godwine rebellion.

¹² Both Ann Williams and Stephen Baxter demonstrate how this Anglo-Saxon practice in the witness lists may aid in identifying family members in their works on the kin-groups of the Mercian ealdormen Ælfhere (956-983) and Leofwine (994-1023). See A. Williams, ‘Princeps Merciorum gentis: the Family, Career and Connections of Ælfhere, Ealdorman of Mercia, 956-83’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 10 (1982), 143-72 (pp. 147-55) and S. Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007), 28-34.

glimpses into extended kin-groups, political networks, and even friendships when its grantees are analysed. For example, Bishop Ælfsige of Winchester's will reveals the close friendship between Ealdorman Ælfheah of Hampshire and the senior cleric.¹³ The ealdorman's own will discloses several family connections including the names of his wife, sons, nephew, and one of his brothers as well as an interesting connection with Queen Ælfthryth.¹⁴ Wills can also reveal the wealth of families through the bequests they record. Still wills, and even charters, provide only snapshots of a period. Wills, in particular, may at times reflect what the grantor hoped would happen rather than what actually did. Through the Domesday Book we are able to trace certain lands bequeathed in some Old English wills; estates never actually given into the grantee's possession. Both of these categories of documents also provide a way to analyse the activities of royal agents as well as their kin-groups.

A final category of documents which proved useful if also frustrating were the various Anglo-Saxon hagiographies. The purpose of saints' *Lives* is of course to promote the holiness and cult of the protagonist. The *vitae* of Saints Dunstan, Oswald, and Æthelwold, the three leaders of the tenth-century reform, were particularly helpful in piecing together the type of family each of these men came from. They also offer some intriguing insights into the activities of bishops at the royal court and on rare occasion interactions between senior clergymen and their secular counterparts. Careful analysis provides a wealth of information. Yet, the one thing many hagiographies of bishops remain silent on is their subjects' episcopal duties. While chronicles, charters, and law-codes provide information on senior clergymen as royal agents performing secular duties, little can be drawn from them or the hagiographies on bishops' primary obligations as clerics. To piece these activities together this thesis examined various canon law collections, conciliar decrees, as well as various ecclesiastical complaints including those

¹³ *Wills*, no. 4.

¹⁴ *Wills*, no. 9. Ælfheah calls Ælfthryth his *gefædere*, probably an indication of a shared godchild or one of them being a godparent to the other's child. See *Wills*, p.123.

found in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, and the much more contemporary writings of Abbot Ælfric and Archbishop Wulfstan II of York. Clerical complaints also proved useful for at least glimpsing what certain clergymen or even monastic houses thought secular leaders should be doing. Only by looking at these various types of sources can the attempt at a proper analysis of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy, both as a group and individuals, and its actions be made.

Throughout, the thesis has made extensive use of the new online database, *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England (PASE)*. The database proved invaluable in processing the various Anglo-Saxon agents. Yet, the website itself is not always the most intuitive and it took some time to figure out how to best employ its search features to sort through the data. The compilers' disinclination to associate entries in the database with the same name even though they were probably the same person could also prove frustrating and required careful reading and comparing of certain royal agents. As with all new compilations of this sort there were also a few mislabelled entries. Despite these vexing inconsistencies, overall *PASE* provided a timely and efficient way to search for family connections among the multitude of Anglo-Saxons found in the extant sources. It greatly increased the speed at which it was possible to find and compare questionable kin-group links and more easily allowed for one of the main goals of this thesis: the comparison of five discernible high-ranking secular kin-groups across the late Anglo-Saxon period.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The mammoth works by the nineteenth-century historians, such as William Stubbs and Frederick Maitland, collected and analysed much of Anglo-Saxon history. While the sheer amount of information in these studies was impressive, their authors were too teleological in their focus. In other words, starting with the end, the Norman Conquest,

and looking back. Like many of their contemporaries, Stubbs and Maitland used words like ‘national’ in discussions of time periods when the nation was not in existence thus giving a false sense of a uniformity in England that did not exist. Both of these men discussed the nature of English society and provided sound overviews but the information they dealt with was so unwieldly that it did not leave them much room for in-depth examinations; family strategy was one area which went completely unexplored. Although Stubbs and Maitland both acknowledged that in the late Anglo-Saxon period senior clergymen were involved in the governance of the kingdom, they really discussed their roles only in relationship to the Church. This division of the royal agents into lay and clerical categories without ever examining them comprehensively as a group of king’s officials sets the tone for the majority of scholarship done in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Arguably the most influential of the monographs written on the whole of the Anglo-Saxon period remains Frank Stenton’s *Anglo-Saxon England*, first published in 1943. Stenton’s work does not indulge as much in teleological views and anachronistic terms as the nineteenth-century historiography does; the sheer scope of the subject matter, however, does not allow for a discussion of family connections and strategies. Nor does Stenton spend much time on royal agents as a whole group. Although the studies by Maitland, Stubbs, and Stenton all have their problems they remain the foundation for scholarship of the Anglo-Saxon period. The majority of recent scholarship has moved away from sweeping overviews and rather explores more specific topics such as the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy, the English Church, or even narrower studies of families and individuals.

Many monographs have been dedicated to the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy. One of the earliest examples is the classic work by L.M. Larson, *The King’s Household in England Before the Norman Conquest*, published in 1904, which provides a picture of the

men who surrounded the king on a daily basis. It offers good insights into the development of the layers of aristocracy. Larson focused on the positions and much less on the individuals who held them. In contrast, Tryggvi Oleson in his *The Witenagemot in the Reign of Edward the Confessor* (1955) analyses the men who came to counsel the king but did not live with him. Oleson gave equal attention to the secular and ecclesiastical leaders but he limited his study to Edward the Confessor's reign and thus avoided issues that would have arose in times of disruption such as the introduction of new men to the body of royal agents under Eadwig, the turnover of royal agents in Æthelred II's reign or the introduction of Danish nobles under Cnut.

Frank Barlow's first edition of *The Feudal Kingdom of England 1042-1216* appeared in 1955, and his biography of Edward the Confessor was published in 1970. Both works contain insightful research but Barlow's focus always remains on the very last stages of the Anglo-Saxon period and the transition into the Anglo-Norman kingdom. Thus, while helpful for activities during Edward the Confessor's reign, like Oleson's work, they become less useful once one goes back into earlier English history. More recent scholarship includes Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (1989), Robin Fleming, *Kings and Lords in Conquest England* (1991), M.K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (1993), Peter Clarke, *The Nobility Under Edward the Confessor* (1994), and Ann Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest* (1997) and *The World Before Domesday* (2011). Stafford's work provides a wonderful overview of the last two centuries of the period. Similarly to Oleson, the other studies focus more on the aristocrats that did not live with the king but only saw him on occasion and contribute to our understanding of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy as a whole. Fleming's monograph explores the tenurial holdings and alliances of the great men, both ecclesiastical and secular, of the late Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman periods.

Furthermore Fleming's research alongside that of Clarke and Williams examines some specific examples of the men and their families who held high office but also concentrate on the levels of aristocrats under the ealdormen. Lawson has examined the Church acting within Anglo-Saxon politics focusing on the interactions between secular and ecclesiastical leaders. Yet, he always does so by viewing their collaborations in terms of support for or against the throne. As king's officials, the ruler can never be forgotten but if a historian's focus is always on the 'royal' aspect of royal agent than many Anglo-Saxon officials lose much of their agency.¹⁵ Additionally, Lawson has continued to analyse, like so many historians, the senior clergy separately from the ealdormen yet a brief survey of the succession crises offer several instances of men working across vocational lines in support or opposition of a political issue. To an extent bishops and ealdormen need to be treated as separate units as certain of their duties were distinctly different or restrictive. But by never analysing them as a single group, royal agents' activities and interactions lack many nuances.

These historians and others have also explored more specific topics only touched upon in the abovementioned broader studies. H.R. Loyn traced and analysed the governmental structures of the Anglo-Saxons in his book *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England, 500-1087* (1984) with the express purpose of contentiously not comparing them to later governments. His work is insightful but the very nature of its questions leave very little room for discussion of individual who worked within this system. James Campbell has written on many aspects of Anglo-Saxon government and society, generally taking the 'maximum' view that the Old English system was a sophisticated institution. His views are best understood in two books of collected essays,

¹⁵ Because of the royal origin of many extant sources some of the best discussions of individual royal agents occurs in studies dedicated to individual kings. See A. Williams, *Æthelred the Unready: The Ill-Counselled King* (London, 2003), pp. 1-42; *Edgar, King of the English, 959-975: New Interpretations*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Woodbridge, 2008), particularly 'Part II: Edgar Before 959'; *Edward the Confessor: the Man and the Legend*, ed. R. Mortimer (Woodbridge, 2009), chapter 1, 2, and 4; and S. Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven, 2011), particularly pp. 29-128.

Essays in Anglo-Saxon History (1986) and *The Anglo-Saxon State* (2000). While he has done much to improve our understanding of the late Anglo-Saxon kingdom, I hesitate to follow him completely and avoid the use of the word ‘state’ as it implies uniformity and unity that do not appear to have existed. Ann Williams also offered her analysis in *Kingship and Governance in Pre-Conquest England* (1999) which interweaves discussion of structures with offices and thus offers some discussion on the individuals who held them. J.R. Maddicott, *The Origins of the English Parliament* (2004) and David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred* (2007) bring light to more specific areas of Anglo-Saxon government while taking more politically focused interests than other studies.

Also heavily focused on the mechanics of Anglo-Saxon government are the recent works by Levi Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871-978* (2013) and George Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (2015). Roach’s research is a welcome addition to older works such as the collected essays in P. S. Barnwell and Marco Mostert, *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages* (2003) and Maddicott’s monograph mentioned above. Molyneaux brings a fresh approach to the subject of a singular English kingdom, particularly with his use of numismatics. Much of the more recent scholarship has been assisted by the earlier research, editing, and data collection by C.R. Hart, *The Early Charters of Eastern England* (1966) and *The Early Charters of Northern England and the North Midlands* (1975), and Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred ‘the Unready’* (1980) and *An Atlas of Attestations in Anglo-Saxon Charters, c. 670-1066* (2002).¹⁶ Other scholars have concentrated on even narrower aspects of Anglo-Saxon society.

Of particular interest to this thesis is the debate that has gone on over the structure of the military and obligations of the English people and their lords during war time. The two extremes of the debate are best represented by C. Warren Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon*

¹⁶ The *Atlas* can also now be found online <<http://www.kemble.asnc.cam.ac.uk/node/30>>. This has made the charter attestations even more accessible and searchable.

Military Institutions on the Eve of the Norman Conquest (1962) and Richard Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (1988). Hollister argued that in times of emergency the whole kingdom was called out, while Abels has contended that only high-ranking men with a direct connection to the king or hopes of obtaining such a link were obliged to bring their commended men to war.

While larger studies leave little room for discussing individuals, certain men and their families have garnered attention from scholars. Multiple books have been dedicated to the family of Earl Godwin including Kenneth Cutler, *The House of Godwine, 1009-1066* (1965), Ian Howard, *Harold: The Last Anglo-Saxon King* (1997), Emma Mason, *The House of Godwine: The History of a Dynasty* (2004) and Frank Barlow, *The Godwines: The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty* (2003). The Godwinesons' greatest rivals have also received recent attention in Stephen Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (2007). Andrew Wareham, *Lords and Communities in Early Medieval East Anglia* (2005) takes a different approach and analysis several families from different levels of society all based in one area. All of these monographs have increased our general understanding of Anglo-Saxon aristocrats and their activities. For the majority of Anglo-Saxon families, however, one must turn to a wide variety of articles.¹⁷ Middling and lower level aristocrats also receive more attention in shorter studies.¹⁸ A full length study of the great families and their strategies as a whole

¹⁷ For ealdormen's families see Hart, 'Half-King', 115-44; C. Hart, 'The Ealdordom of Essex', in *An Essex Tribute: Essays presented to Frederick G. Emmison as a Tribute to his Life and Work for Essex History and Archives*, ed. K. Neale (London, 1987), pp. 57-84; P. N. Cronenwett, 'Ealdorman Æthelweard and his family, ca. 935-1038', *Old English Newsletter*, 12 (1979), 26; A. Williams, 'Princeps Merciorum gentis', 143-72; A. Williams, 'The King's Nephew: the Family and Career of Ralph, Earl of Hereford', in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, C. J. Holdsworth, and J. L. Nelson (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1989), pp. 327-43; M. Locherbie-Cameron, 'Byrhtnoth and his Family', in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. D. Scragg (Oxford, 1991), pp. 253-62; P. A. Stafford, 'Kinship and women in the world of Maldon: Byrhtnoth and his family', in *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact.*, ed. J. Cooper (London, 1993), pp. 225-35; and S. Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', in *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. A. Rumble (London, 1994), pp. 44-83.

¹⁸ For thegnly families see A. Williams, 'A Vice-Comital Family in Pre-Conquest Warwickshire', in *Anglo-Norman Studies, XI: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1988*, ed. R. A. Brown (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1989), pp. 279-95; A. Williams, 'A West-Country Magnate of the Eleventh Century: the Family, Estates and Patronage of Beorhtric son of Ælfgar', in *Family Trees and the Roots of Politics: The Prosopography of Britain and France from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century*, ed. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (Woodbridge, Suffolk,

is needed which does not just focus on tenurial holdings. This is one problem which this thesis starts to remedy. Yet, as already stated, we cannot study secular agents without their ecclesiastical counterparts.

There has been much research dedicated to the Anglo-Saxon Church both the institution as a whole and to singular features of it. The classic studies by Margaret Deansley, *The Church in Pre-Conquest England* (1961) and John Godfrey, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (1962) provided a basis for modern scholarship on the early English Church but have been surpassed by more recent monographs. H.R. Loyn, *The English Church 940-1154* (2000) focuses on the state of the Church during and after the Norman Conquest. Unlike, Frank Barlow in his first volume *The English Church, 1000-1066* (1963), Loyn looked on the late Anglo-Saxon Church in a favourable light.¹⁹ Both historians acknowledge that ealdormen are the equivalent of bishops but tend, as their titles indicate, to focus their analysis on ecclesiastical matters. The newest large survey of the English Church during the Anglo-Saxon period is John Blair's *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (2005). Unlike his predecessors, many of whom argued that there were huge changes, between the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Church, Blair takes great pains to demonstrate the continuity between the two. Although convincing in many of his

1997), pp. 41-68; A. Williams, 'Lost Worlds: Kentish Society in the Eleventh Century', *Medieval Prosopography: History and Collective Biography*, 20 (1999), 51-74; A. Wareham, 'The Transformation of Kinship and the Family in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Early Medieval Europe*, 10 (2001), 375-99; A. Wareham, 'Two Models of Marriage: Kinship and the Social Order in England and Normandy', in *Negotiating Secular and Ecclesiastical Power: Western Europe in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. A.-J. A. Bijsterveld, H. Teunis, and A. Wareham (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 107-32; C. Senecal, 'Bishops as Contenders for Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England: The Bishopric of East Anglia and the Regional Aristocracy', in *Negotiating Secular and Ecclesiastical Power: Western Europe in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. A.-J. A. Bijsterveld, H. Teunis, and A. Wareham (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 89-106; M. Hare, 'Deerhurst's Earliest Patrons: Æthelmund and Æthelric', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 130 (2012), 151-82; C. Insley, 'The Family of Wulfric Spott: an Anglo-Saxon Marcher Dynasty?', in *The English and Their Legacy, 900-1200*, ed. R. David (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2012), pp. 115-28; L. Marten, 'Meet the Swarts: Tracing a Thegnley Family in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *The English and Their Legacy, 900-1200*, ed. R. David (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2012), pp. 17-32; and J. Mumby, 'The Descent of Family Land in Later Anglo-Saxon England', *Historical Research*, 84 (2011), 399-415.

¹⁹ F. Barlow, *The English Church, 1000-1066: A History of the Later Anglo-Saxon Church* 2nd edn (London, 1979), p. 27 and F. Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England, 1042-1216* 5th edn (London, 1999), p. 34.

arguments, Blair occasionally strains credibility with some of his points about the continuity across the Norman Conquest.

As with the secular half of society, many historians have written on singular aspects of the Anglo-Saxon Church as well. Nicholas Brooks examined the archbishopric of Canterbury in his *The Early History of Canterbury Cathedral* (1984). Similarly, Francesca Tinti, *Sustaining Belief: The Church of Worcester c. 870 to c.1100* (2010) provides an in-depth look at the diocese of Worcester and the bishops who held it. Because of the nature of the sources much of the more specific topics have revolved around monasticism particularly in the tenth-century reform such as the edited volumes by David Parsons, *Tenth-Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and the Regularis Concordia* (1975) and David Rollason, *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century* (2010). Both volumes provide chapters on various aspects of the Benedictine reform in England. Mechthild Gretsch offers further insights in her *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform* (1999).

Much of the best research on the tenth-century Benedictine reform can be found in studies dedicated to the movement's leaders, Archbishops Dunstan and Oswald and Bishop Æthelwold. First published in 1988, Douglas Dale, *Dunstan: Saint and Statesmen* tackles the archbishop of Canterbury in his dual role as cleric and royal agent. The same year Barbara Yorke's edited volume, *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence* (1988) did the same thing for the cantankerous prelate of Winchester. Yorke's chapter in particular offers some thought-provoking suggestions for Æthelwold's familial connections to Winchester. Archbishop Oswald received similar treatment in Nicholas Brooks' and Catherine Cubitt's edited volume, *St. Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence* (1996). Some of the results of this movement can best be seen in studies dedicated to one of Oswald's successors such as the edited volume by Matthew Townend, *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference* (2004).

These works have been instrumental in advancing our understanding of not only the Anglo-Saxon monasteries but also the late tenth- and early eleventh-century episcopate. Yet, as Mary Frances Giandrea has pointed out little work has been on the secular clergy of the late Anglo-Saxon period, particularly those raised to bishoprics. A problem she helped to remedy in her book *Episcopal Culture in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (2007). Her analysis includes the secular and religious roles of the Anglo-Saxon prelates and stands in useful juxtaposition to the not only the research on the monastic reform but also to that done on the Old English aristocracy.

None of these works, however, truly looks at royal agents through the lens of their familial networks and the majority continue to treat secular and ecclesiastical leaders as two separate groups with clearly defined lines rather than as a single group to see if there were more similarities than differences in the families and duties of ealdormen and bishops. In the following pages of this thesis I attempt to do just such an analysis.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This thesis contains five chapters. In Chapter 1, I provide a brief overview of a bishop's place in society as well as his episcopal duties. I then trace the family connections among the late Anglo-Saxon bishops, paying particular attention to the three dioceses of Canterbury, Winchester, and Worcester. These bishoprics provide the most extant records regarding their successive prelates but other sees are included when documentation survives. To determine why certain clerics were chosen for bishoprics, I analyse the sequence of men in office presenting the facts which can be deduced about their personal and professional backgrounds before offering what this implies about ecclesiastical royal agents. Within the overarching analysis I address the fact that most bishops, early in their career, have a discernible connection with the royal court, and how essential this became for their advancement.

Chapter 2 presents the familial backgrounds of ealdormen and earls. Additionally, I explore how men were appointed to high secular office by identifying and exploring three avenues: lineage, merit, or a combination of the two. My analysis of the five families in tenth- and eleven-century England who held at least one ealdordom for more than one generation allows for a clearer understanding of the secular office holders and the way lineage could influence appointments. In contrast to the great families, I make use of individual appointments to discuss merit based appoints which are also visible during the time period. When possible an assessment of the location of appointments in relation to the officials' original patrimony is done to provide a full as picture as possible of the system of appointments and the king's decision in employing it. To conclude my discussion of individuals in the kingdom's administrative system I survey the increased use of royal reeves in the late tenth century and explore why this expansion may have occurred.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the duties of royal agents on a kingdom-wide level. I begin with royal agents in their role as counsellors to the king at the 'national' assemblies then argue that their other responsibilities can be divided into two sub-groups. First, within the kingdom, bishops and ealdormen were involved in taxation, justice, law code dissemination, witnessing land grants or forfeitures, and witnessing or carrying out of royal punishments. Second category involved duties dealing with groups and individuals outside the English kingdom. Extant sources record various royal agents making truces and negotiating treaties, and when deemed necessary, paying tribute to Viking raiding parties. Documents also reveal the king's agents leading 'national' armies, and acting as ambassadors to foreign courts. Yet, these were only some of royal officials' responsibilities.

Complimentary to the discussion of kingdom-wide duties in the third chapter, Chapter 4 explores the duties of the royal agents within their locality. To provide the

framework within which royal agents performed their local duties I discuss the basics of the shire, hundredal, diocesan, and ‘parochial’ systems.²⁰ Furthermore, I contrast the idealized version of regional responsibilities presented by some clerical writers, royally issued law-codes, charters, and writs with the reality of the activities which extant sources show the royal agents actually performing on the regional level. This chapter also addresses the dual nature of the role of bishops as king’s men and churchmen. Finally, I argue that my assessment of the fundamental similarities in the duties assigned to bishops and earls points towards an inherent (or attempt at) stability in the late Anglo-Saxon administrative system.

In the fifth and final chapter I complete the analysis of the assigned duties and responsibilities by focusing on the military obligations of all royal agents. The original purpose of the ealdorman was the leading of armed forces and this remained one of his main duties, yet defence of the realm did not always mean leading men into battle and the final chapter’s analysis includes these other activities. A bishop was equal in status (in the eyes of the law) to the ealdorman and, as I argue throughout the thesis, was assigned many similar duties. Canon law, however, prohibited clerics from being involved in bloodshed. Chapter 5 analyses how late Anglo-Saxon prelates completed their duties as a royal agent in view of this restriction. Using the three common burdens and their connections to landownership as a lens I argue a picture of royal agents’ military obligations becomes clearer. Additionally, I do a comparative analysis of local and national defence as well as defensive and aggressive actions allowing for an improved understanding of the extent to which the king delegated military matters to his agents as well as the ruler’s own role in the defence of his realm.

It is hoped that by using familial and larger kin-group connections as a starting point in examining royal agents and their official duties we will come to a better

²⁰ While there were divisions below the diocesan level it is too early in England to speak of a true parochial system.

understanding of the men who held these offices and the links which connected them. More specifically, these connections provide new insights into the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy, their strategies for gaining and maintaining political power and influence, and how they functioned within the system of royally controlled appointments. Before examining these areas, however, let us turn to the royal agents; we will begin with the kin-groups of the senior clergymen.

Chapter 1

Episcopal Identity and Preferment in the Dioceses of Canterbury, Winchester, and Worcester

Oswald the holy monk went to Oscytel, archbishop of York, who was his relative through earthly kinship. . . he kept Oswald with him for several days, introducing him to all his friends, and particularly to the venerable bishop Dunstan.¹

Byrhtferth of Ramsey, *Vita sancti Oswaldi*

Archbishop Oswald of York and Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester, two leading promoters of the Benedictine Reform in tenth-century England, did not obtain their high ecclesiastical offices in the English kingdom by reputation alone. In fact, as demonstrated by their hagiographies, their eventual episcopal appointments by the king resulted from their coming to the royal attention through familial and court connections. Æthelwold, particularly, spent several years at the court of Æthelstan before entering minor orders and eventually becoming a priest, both supposedly at the king's command.² Oswald may have spent little time at the royal court as a young man but much of his education was overseen by his uncle, Archbishop Oda of Canterbury (941-958) and another kinsman, Archbishop Oscytel of York (958-971), introduced the future saint to Archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury. It was Dunstan who suggested Oswald to the king for the vacant see of Worcester in 961.³

Æthelwold and Oswald, together with Archbishop Dunstan, are the best documented prelates in the tenth century. They are, however, by no means the only clerics whose careers demonstrate how much familial and court ties could aid in the process of episcopal preferment. Although easier to study than their contemporary

¹ VSO, iii.4.

² VSÆ, ch. 7.

³ VSO, iii.4.

bishops, Dunstan, Oswald, and Æthelwold are not the focus of this chapter. Rather, they form part of a survey of the episcopal successions in the dioceses of Canterbury, Winchester, and Worcester from 950 to 1050. This information reveals much about Anglo-Saxon bishops in the tenth and eleventh centuries and sheds light on why these men were chosen as episcopal leaders. Not only will we examine the sequence of the men in office but also what can be deduced about their family, background, and the positions they held before their final episcopal seats. I chose Canterbury, Winchester, and Worcester for the practical reason that these three dioceses preserved the most documents from the time period. These dioceses also provide interesting comparisons among themselves as to the succession of their bishops, what effect (or even force) the Benedictine Reform had on the king's choices to each particular see, and why the king may have appointed different types of clerics to specific sees.

While this chapter originally started with the intent of searching out family connections among the great secular and ecclesiastical magnates of tenth- and eleventh-century England, I have found that Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical and lay leaders did not share the same families or, if they did, the connections went unrecorded. Simply put, I have not identified any bishop as the brother or cousin to an ealdorman or earl. Although poorly documented, the glimpses we do have reveal that prelates' brothers either also entered the Church or appear as landholders near the kin-group's area of origin.⁴ The few senior clergymen who may have come from great aristocratic families belonged to lines which had fallen from power. The prime example is Archbishop Æthelnoth of Canterbury (1020-1038) who may have belonged to the family of Æthelweard the Chronicler.⁵ These declining families were often the remnants of a kin that had been at the top of the aristocratic power structure, a position which typically did not last more than three

⁴ Of the eleven archbishops under discussion only Dunstan had a recorded lay male sibling. See *PASE*, Dunstan 1 and Wulfic 36. Ælfric also had a brother Leofric, but both became monks and successive abbots at St. Albans. See *PASE*, Ælfric 46 and Leofric 30.

⁵ See below pp. 37-41 for a discussion of prelates who seem to have come from high aristocratic families.

generations in Anglo-Saxon England. Rather than examining the sources for apparently non-existent family networks among the kingdom's elite lay and church leaders and how this may have led to episcopal preferment, I have focused on how these prelates were connected to the royal court. Before we dive into untangling the various prelates' kin-groups I want to briefly lay out some contemporary (or near contemporary) ideas about the place of senior clergymen and ealdormen in society and what ecclesiastical duties men appointed to bishoprics may have performed. These issues are essential to understand both the questions explored in this chapter and my analysis of duties owed to the king in subsequent chapters.

THE BISHOP'S PLACE IN SOCIETY

One cannot discuss medieval clergy and lay leaders together without encountering the idea of society being made up of three orders: those who fight (*bellatores*), those who prayed (*oratores*), and those who worked (*laboratores*). Three Anglo-Saxon writers discuss the basic idea of three orders in society and a fourth makes a brief but clear mention of such a division. King Alfred's Old English translation of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* provides the earliest English example of the idea that society could be divided on a tripartite model. The ninth-century ruler inserted several additions to the Latin texts including the following, 'in the case of the king, the resources and tools with which to rule are that he have his land fully manned; he must have praying men, fighting men, and working men.'⁶ Alfred's translation was long accepted as the first recorded occurrence of the idea in medieval writings, even by Georges Duby in his influential work *The Three Orders*.⁷ More recent scholarship, however, has made a strong

⁶ *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. W. J. Sedgefield (Oxford, 1899), ch. XVII: 'þæt bið þonne cyninges andweorc and his tol mid to ricsianne, þæt he hæbbe his lond fullmonnad; he sceal habban gebedmen and fyrdmen and weorcmen.' trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 132.

⁷ G. Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (Chicago, 1980), p. 7.

case that Alfred may have been influenced by the works of two successive abbots of Auxerre, Haimo (d. 866) and Heiric (d. 877x883), who both mention a tripartite division of society.⁸ Abbot Haimo probably borrowed the idea from the *Etymologiae* of Saint Isidore of Seville.⁹ While he may not have invented the idea, Alfred's commentary on the triple division differs from these abbots and even the English writers who come after him in that he meditates on his own role as king. Both abbots of Auxerre used the divisions to try and prove some ecclesiastical point.¹⁰ In contrast, for Alfred, all three groups or *geferscipum* were royal tools united by the king's need of them. All three functions mattered for the making of a fully manned (*fullmonnad*) kingdom.¹¹ David Pratt has made the important point that promotion of this way of thinking aided Alfred's building projects 'supplying vital manpower for burghal construction while leaving one half of the *fyrð* 'at home.'¹² Thus, men not out serving in the king's host performed the still much needed function of the *weorcmen*. Contemporary sources indicate that there may have been a labour shortage during Alfred's reign and in order to get his system of borough forts in place Alfred had to convince his people of his legitimate royal need for their services.¹³ More importantly, he may have had to convince his high-ranking men to fulfil their obligations by dealing with labour shortages on their own estates in order to build the burghal forts.

⁸ For a good summary of the major works on the Three Orders see T. E. Powell, 'The 'Three Orders' of Society in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 23 (1994), 103-32 (pp. 106-09).

⁹ For abbot Haimo's mention of a three way division *sacerdotes, milites, and agricultores* see Haimo of Auxerre, *Expositio in Apocalypsin*, PL 117:953. For Abbot Heiric's division into *oratores, belligerantes, and agricolantes* see *De miraculis Sancti Germani episcopi*, PL 124:1254. The late ninth-century anonymous author of the *Miracula sancti Bertini* also has a three way division when describing a Frankish victory over the Vikings: *bellatores, oratores*, and the rather vague *imbelle vulgus*. See *Miracula Sancti Bertini* MGH SS 15.1:513. For commentary on the passage in *Miracula sancti Bertini* see J. L. Nelson, 'The Political Ideas of Alfred of Wessex', in *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. J. Duggan (London, 1993), pp. 125-58 (p. 143) and Powell, 'Three Orders', 108.

¹⁰ Powell, 'Three Orders', 107 and D. Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 293.

¹¹ David Pratt makes an interesting comparison between Alfred's societal divisions and Asser's report of the three way proportioning of secular revenues among the thegns in the royal household: 'fighting-men', craftsmen, and foreigners in royal service. He does bring up Alfred's division of the *fyrð* into two halves but places more emphasis on the building and labour both at home and for the king that this division provides. This is a convincing point but he fails to acknowledge that it was in fact a third group of men mentioned in the annal for 893 those who were to man the boroughs. See Pratt, *Political Thought*, p. 294.

¹² Pratt, *Political Thought*, p. 294.

¹³ Pratt, *Political Thought*, p. 294.

Although Alfred was the first English author to discuss a tripartite societal split, the idea does not appear to have captured the interest of most Anglo-Saxon writers. It is not until a century later that the idea of three orders within society reappears in English sources. Both Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham and Archbishop Wulfstan II of York employed the idea of a trifunctional society in at least one of their works. Ælfric used it in three separate texts, of which the earliest was a homiletic piece on the Maccabees in the *Lives of the Saints*, written for the abbot's lay patrons, Ealdorman Æthelweard and his son Æthelmær.¹⁴ The second passage is found in a pastoral letter to Archbishop Wulfstan, and the third example appears in a commentary on the Old and New Testaments addressed to a layman named Sigeweard.¹⁵ Despite the fact that he wrote the first and third works in Old English, Ælfric used the Latin terms (*bellatores*, *oratores*, and *laboratores*) for the tripartite division in all three works.¹⁶ He also for the most part employed the idea of a three-way societal division to promote his stance against clerics physically fighting on the battlefield. Thus, like the earlier abbots of Auxerre, this Anglo-Saxon cleric made use of the trifold division to prove a theological point. Only in the third work, his biblical commentary, did Ælfric reiterate Alfred's use of the idea to promote a unity of groups in support of the crown. Additionally he focused more on the role of the *oratores* as defenders of the land and urged the letter's addressee, quite possibly a well-to-do thegn, that all the king's councillors needed to ensure that the none of the three legs, which support the crown, broke.¹⁷

Timothy Powell has argued that Ælfric employed the theory of three societal orders as a new means of arguing against clerics being involved in battle—merely

¹⁴ Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* ed. W.W. Skeat (London, 1881), II, ch. 25. For commentary on this particular piece see J. Halbrooks, 'Ælfric, the Maccabees, and the Problem of Christian Heroism', *Studies in Philology*, 106 (2009), 263-84.

¹⁵ C&S, no. 252 and *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch: Aelfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and His Preface to Genesis*, ed. S. J. Crawford (London, 1922), p. 71-2. Simon Keynes has tentatively identified Sigeweard as the thegn Siward who appears among the witness lists during Æthelred II's reign. See Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 132-34.

¹⁶ Powell, "Three Orders", 113.

¹⁷ S. Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop and the Viking Raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 36 (2007), 151-220 (pp. 166-67).

repeating the existing canons forbidding men in holy orders from participating in bloodshed was apparently not working.¹⁸ The abbot always made clear that it was the function of the *bellatores* to protect the land against the invading army with physical or earthly weapons and that the *oratores* were to fight spiritual battles. Yet, as Powell has pointed out, the efforts of the Church to turn the office of kingship into a sacred, or at least semi-sacred, position as a representative of God on earth had led to an understandable belief among many medieval Christians that obeying the king, even fighting for him on the battlefield, was equivalent to obeying God.¹⁹ Thus, Ælfric may well have been engaged in an actual debate ongoing in the Church over the involvement of clerics in warfare.

For the most part Powell's argument is convincing, although he does not completely address the fact that Ælfric wrote two of his texts for laymen and merely notes that Ælfric appears to have intended many of his texts to be available to a wider audience than his monastery.²⁰ Yet, if Ælfric was in direct debate over clerics involved in bloodshed it appears strange that these passages are found in texts written for laymen. Granted that Ealdorman Æthelweard and his family were one among the few high-ranking secular kin-groups who may have been closely related to a senior clergyman (Archbishop Æthelnoth) this still does not explain why the majority of examples are given to lay royal agents. Unless the abbot's complaint that 'earthly warriors should not compel the servants of God to earthly warfare away from the spiritual war' means the debate the abbot had become embroiled in involved laymen more than other clerics.²¹ Ælfric may have been addressing both secular and clerical opponents. The answer may actually lie in another traceable theme within Ælfric's works: royal councillors should

¹⁸ Powell, "Three Orders", 118, 120-124.

¹⁹ Powell, "Three Orders", 125-28.

²⁰ Powell, "Three Orders", 110.

²¹ Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints*, II, ch. 25: 'Nu ne sceolon þa woruld-cempan to þam woruld-licum gefeohte þa Godes þe neadian fram þam gastlican gewinne.'

give good advice to the king.²² While Sigeweard cannot be concretely identified, Ealdorman Æthelweard, his son (an eventual ealdorman in his own right), and Archbishop Wulfstan by virtue of their offices acted as part of the king's *witan* and among those who might have advised the king to not use clergymen as warriors.

The final two examples of the idea of the three orders are in found in Archbishop Wulfstan's *Institutes of Polity* and the earliest *Vita Sancti Dunstani* by the anonymous author known only as B. Unlike his contemporary, Ælfric, the archbishop did not use the tripartite division to argue for clerics only being involved in spiritual warfare. Indeed, Wulfstan in other texts demonstrated that he felt more leniently about this and other issues that Ælfric denounced outright. Wulfstan, living in the turbulent times of the reign of Æthelred II, used the idea to focus on establishing stability throughout the realm. After describing the function of the *oratores*, *laboratores*, and *bellatores*, Wulfstan continued, 'on these three pillars every throne shall stand upright in a Christian nation. And if any of them weakens, the throne will soon totter and if any of them should break then the throne will fall and that will damage the people.'²³ Like Ælfric, Wulfstan seems to have made use of Alfred's interpretation of the three orders as a tri-support system for the throne. Yet, unlike the abbot, who used it to debate the place of clerics in battle and also distinct from King Alfred, who concentrated on the role of the ruler, Wulfstan focused on what would be best for the people of the realm and how they could aid in its stability. A theme found in his other writings including his famous *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. All the orders had to work together for the sake of a stable kingdom.

The final pre-Conquest author, B, also emphasised the importance of consistency within the realm. The reference is brief but in discussing Dunstan as both archbishop and royal councillor, B reported that the saint fortified 'by the word of life and his own

²² Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop', 162-64.

²³ *Die "Institutes of polity, civil and ecclesiastical."*: *Ein Werk Erzbischof Wulfstans von York*, ed. K. Jost (Bern, 1959), p. 57: 'On þyssum ðrym stapelum sceall ælc cynestol standan mid rihte on cristenre þeode. And awacie heora ænig, sona se stol scylfð; and fulberste heora ænig, þonne hrysð se stol nyðer, and þæt wyrð þære þeode eall to upþearfe.'

example to strengthen and duly maintain the whole human order, in its threefold division.’²⁴ The author of the *vita* then moved on to other topics but this short commentary reveals that the idea was known beyond the high-level circles of abbots and archbishops. The fact that B did not name the three divisions may also indicate an assumption on his part that his audience was familiar with the concept of a tripartite societal system.²⁵ This brief survey has demonstrated that the idea of the three orders existed in England during the late Anglo-Saxon period. Each of the authors employed the concept in a different way but a basic understanding of the idea of a tri-functional society can safely be said to have been present particularly in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Thus, bishops as clerics were supposed to pray and if necessary fight the spiritual battles for the kingdom while their secular counterparts engaged in physical warfare. Much of these writings revolve around who should fight physical battles but we will set that issue aside for a moment. Having established the place of bishops within society let us briefly examine more closely what their episcopal duties would have entailed.

THE EPISCOPAL DUTIES OF A BISHOP

In the *vita* of Saint Æthelwold, Bishop of Ælfheah of Winchester ordains both Æthelwold and his contemporary Dunstan to the priesthood on the same day.²⁶ The same work includes a miracle story of a deacon, while traveling with the then Bishop Æthelwold, losing a container of holy oil along the road and miraculously finding it. The initial loss was not discovered until after the bishop had ‘come to his destination...celebrated mass, spoke the sweet words of his holy sermon, and then, as usual, ordered the oil for

²⁴ VSO, ch. 37.3.

²⁵ Powell, "Three Orders", 117.

²⁶ VSÆ, ch. 8.

confirming the boy to be given him.’²⁷ This short story indicates that at least Æthelwold travelled around his diocese and administered the sacrament of confirmation. Although actual evidence is sparse, there is nothing to indicate that his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors were not doing the same things. The *Life* of Saint Dunstan recorded that as a young man, Dunstan travelled with his kinsman, Bishop Ælfheah, when the prelate needed to dedicated a church in his diocese.²⁸ These stories also show bishops did not travel by themselves.²⁹

Like all ordained priests, bishops spent at least some of their time in the saying of masses, delivering sermons, hearing confessions, and providing penance to sinners. A letter Abbot Ælfric wrote for Bishop Wulfsgie III of Sherborne spells out some episcopal duties which separated bishop and mass-priest. Namely prelates needed to perform ordination, confirmation, consecration of church ‘to watch over God’s dues.’³⁰ The first three were important status-changing ceremonies; responsibilities ordinary priests could not or should not perform. In the same vein as the consecration of churches should be added the blessing of altars and cemeteries.³¹ We can catch glimpses of some of these activities in various saints’ *Lives*. As we have just seen, the *vitae* of Saint Æthelwold and Saint Dunstan confirm that at least some bishops were peripatetic in their dioceses. These journeys were initially mentioned much earlier in Bede’s letter to Archbishop Ecgbert of York, travels necessary for the performance of ecclesiastical duties.³² It seems very probable that as they performed this circuit around their diocese they combined their episcopal duties with any responsibilities they needed to execute as a royal representative. For example, it seems possible that a bishop could stop at a town or village along the way to a shire meeting in order to confirm the local children. Additionally, one has to wonder

²⁷ *VSÆ*, ch. 32.

²⁸ *VSD*, 8.2-8.4.

²⁹ Bede’s letter to Archbishop Ecgbert in 734 reveals that earlier prelates also travelled around their dioceses.

³⁰ *C&S*, no. 40 §43: ‘Nis na mare betwyx mæssepreoste and bisceope buton þæt se bisceop bið gesett to hadigenne preostas 7 to bisceopgenne cild 7 to halgyenne cyrcan 7 to gymenne Godes gerihta.’

³¹ M. F. Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 101.

³² *EEE*, §5.

if ‘watching over God’s dues’ prepared bishops for the added burden of gathering the Danegeld when called upon to do so and if their travels across their dioceses facilitated this collection.

Ælfric’s list is short and stresses the differences between the levels of clergymen. To this list can be added the blessing of the three holy oils on Maundy Thursday, examining a candidate for the priesthood, consecrating nuns, and overseeing general pastoral care within his diocese most likely at annual meetings with his clergy.³³ Furthermore, the *vitae* of the saintly bishops Æthelwold and Oswald indicate that pastoral care extended beyond examining and placing priests in parishes. Æthelwold ‘was a father and shepherd to his monks, an unsleeping champion of nuns and virgins, consoler of widows, receiver of pilgrims, defender of churches. He set right those who had gone astray, refreshed the poor, helped wards and orphans.’³⁴ He also fed part of his flock during a famine and was hospitable to guests who visited his monastery.³⁵ Archbishop Oswald is recorded doing similar activities as he ‘went around to all the estates entrusted to him, and he generously provided alms for the poor. . . He was not deficient in justice and was esteemed for his kindness, was attentive to guests, considerate of the needy and poor.’³⁶ That it was a bishop’s duty to feed the poor and be hospitable to guests is also found in Wulfstan’s ‘Admonition to Bishops’.³⁷ Interestingly enough, while Æthelwold’s responsibilities easily fit into the category ‘ecclesiastical’ Oswald’s list of activities freely intersperse the ecclesiastical with the secular. The secular side of prelates’ duties will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

³³ Archbishop Wulfstan describes how a candidate for ordination should be examined in detail, see *C&S* no. 57.

³⁴ *VSÆ*, ch. 28.

³⁵ *VSÆ*, ch. 19 and 29. The *vita* gives no indication of these guests’ identities as the focus of the story is Æthelwold’s survival of the attempted poisoning by the clerics he had ousted from cathedral in Winchester. The visitors could have been important high-ranking officials or humble pilgrims. The famine is probably the same as the one recorded in the *ASC* C s.a. 976.

³⁶ *VSO*, ii.5.

³⁷ *C&S* no. 55 §7 and §8.

As we have both established the place of bishops as clerics within late Anglo-Saxon society and pinpointed the ecclesiastical duties prelates specifically owed to the Church, it is now possible to turn our attention to the senior clergymen themselves. Using the lens of episcopal succession in the dioceses of Canterbury, Winchester, and Worcester we are now able to examine this chapter's principal questions. Namely, what were the identities and familial connections of tenth- and eleventh century English bishops and what was the role these kin-groups may have had in the clergymen's episcopal preferment. Before we get to the actual episcopal lists, however, one specific group of clerics must be mentioned.

PRIESTS IN THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD

The century 950-1050 witnessed the rise of powerful monasteries and monk-bishops. In studies of these hundred years, secular clerics are often overshadowed if not ignored in favour of their better documented counterparts—or perhaps one should say better self-chronicled. Yet, secular clerics did not disappear from England and one group in particular must be discussed in order to get the fullest picture of the English episcopate: priests in the royal household. Both before and after the Benedictine Reform, kings appointed many bishops from among their own clerics.³⁸ These clerics would have not only performed religious duties but also acted as part of the court and had 'custody of the royal collection of holy relics, at least some part of the royal archives, and perhaps even of the king's seal'.³⁹ In other words, the king would have known them fairly well and been aware of their leadership abilities as well as loyalty to him. This knowledge would have been important in an era when the king made all episcopal appointments. Indeed,

³⁸ Both Æthelstan and Edward the Confessor appointed multiple royal priests to bishoprics. See M. F. Smith, 'The Preferment of Royal Clerks in the Reign of Edward the Confessor', *Haskins Society Journal*, 9 (2001), 159-73 (pp. 159-60) and S. Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven, 2011), p. 97.

³⁹ S. Keynes, 'Regenbald the Chancellor (sic)', in *Anglo-Norman Studies, X: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1987*, ed. R. A. Brown (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1988), pp. 185-222 (p. 191).

even men like Dunstan and Æthelwold who were probably not official royal clerics spent time at court, providing the king or his successor with knowledge of their capabilities. While many of the reformers' episcopal successors are not as well documented and there is often little to no evidence of them ever being at court, the tendency of kings (as we shall see below) to appoint men who had spent time in the courtly circle raises the question of how bishops received their appointment. They may have been handpicked by men like Dunstan or gained sees through reputations of holiness. Yet, at least the *Vita sancti Oswaldi* indicates that Oswald travelled with a retinue of his own including monks and lay servants.⁴⁰ It is very possible that the majority of monk-bishops may have spent time at the royal court in one of the retinues of the great reformers.

CANTERBURY⁴¹

Any senior clergyman who attained the archbishopric of Canterbury reached the pinnacle of an ecclesiastical career in Anglo-Saxon England. The influence of the metropolitan see at court surely made the position desirable to many clerics. Domesday Book clearly reveals the archbishopric's wealth and the place of attestation of all the archbishops indicates the prestige of the title. No matter what position a man might have attested when a bishop, as the archbishop of Canterbury, he almost always witnessed in the first position.⁴² Rarely absent from among the named witnesses the archbishop of Canterbury seems to have been a constant presence at the royal court. Canterbury had always been the metropolitan see of England despite its distance from the larger activity centres like London and Winchester and this also indicates the prestige of the title. Although staffed by a long line of monk-archbishops starting with Dunstan in 959, Canterbury cathedral

⁴⁰ VSO, iii.13 and iv.16.

⁴¹ See Figure 1 for a complete list of archbishops from c. 950-c.1050 and their periods in office.

⁴² See Keynes, *Atlas*. On the rare occasion that the archbishop of Canterbury did not attest in the first position, he was either absent from the witness list or superseded by the archbishop of York for a charter or two. Normally this occurred if York was the new archbishop's senior in some way.

itself did not become monastic until the late 990s, well after Dunstan's death.⁴³ This change occurred much later than at other cathedrals, particularly the see of Winchester where the secular clerics were forcibly removed in 964.

The question naturally arises of who these men were that rose to the apex of the Anglo-Saxon church. The prestige and wealth of the title put them on equal footing with the highest lay magnates of the realm. Because of the status and influence of the archbishopric it becomes necessary, as much as possible, to determine whether prelates differed from the ealdormen with whom they mingled at the royal court. To answer these questions we must first look at the bishops' backgrounds, particularly what can be gleaned about their family ties.

Family Connections

While not always clear or determinable, the traceable familial networks of the archbishops of Canterbury often add nuances to the king's decision to favour a certain cleric over his fellow churchmen. Archbishops who seem to have links to aristocratic families are among some of the most interesting appointees but few appear to be related in any way to ealdormen. For example, Dunstan may well have belonged to an aristocratic family, although seemingly not one of ealdorman-status and Ælfsige's will indicates he had connections among the West Saxon aristocracy.⁴⁴ Only two archbishops appear to have blood links to ealdormen: Ælfric and Æthelnoth. Both are named as the son of high-ranking aristocrats (although technically the text mentions Ælfric's brother not the archbishop). Unfortunately, both of these claims must be somewhat suspect since they only exist in post-Conquest sources.

⁴³ D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: A History of its Development from the Times of St. Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 940-1216* 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1963), p. 50. Knowles goes on to add that while it appears Dunstan made no overt move to change the cathedral into a monastery—an action credited to his successors either Sigeric or Ælfric—that does not mean Dunstan did not surround himself with monks, using them as his personal and official assistants.

⁴⁴ ODNB, 'Ælfsige', Barbara Yorke [accessed 12 December 2011].

According to the *Gesta abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, Abbot Leofric, Archbishop Ælfric's brother, was the 'son of the earl of Kent' (*filius Comitis Canicae*).⁴⁵ The author did not describe Ælfric himself in similar terms, although he also served as an abbot of St. Albans. Despite the lack of a corresponding reference about his paternal background, Nicholas Brooks describes Ælfric as a wealthy and influential man 'whose career reveals a characteristic mixture of the virtues of the monastery and the acquisitiveness of the noble.'⁴⁶ Although he was the abbot of a reformed monastery, Ælfric, like Dunstan before him, was a pluralist. If Ælfric came from a Kentish family who had obtained ealdorman status, his kin-group may have originated, and thus had a power base, in the southeast where he became archbishop. Yet he retained the much poorer see of Ramsbury throughout his time at Canterbury, making his plurality a distinct choice rather than a financial necessity. The counterpoint to Ælfric's plurality of course is the archbishops of York, starting with Oswald, who retained Worcester because the northern metropolitan see lacked the resources of the southern archbishopric and required the financial support of a richer southern see. Still Ælfric's actions may also be, as Nicholas Brooks has suggested, comparable with the actions of secular noblemen. Perhaps the best example would be Harold Godwineson, who even though he moved from the earldom of East Anglia to replace his father as earl of Wessex still retained a large number of estates in East Anglia. Although Ælfric had been trained in reformed monasticism, not all of his actions can be interpreted as those which belong to a strictly observant monk.

The other archbishop who may have belonged to a high-ranking aristocratic family was Æthelnoth. Like Archbishop Ælfric, mention of his supposed aristocratic background only appeared in a post-Conquest text. John of Worcester noted the appointment of Æthelnoth to Canterbury in his chronicle and remarked that the new

⁴⁵ *Gesta abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed. H. T. Riley (London, 1867), p. 28.

⁴⁶ N. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (Leicester, 1984), p. 286.

archbishop was the son of Æthelmær.⁴⁷ Nicholas Brooks found this election fascinating because Æthelnoth was the first archbishop since 890 to be appointed directly to the see rather than being translated.⁴⁸ He interpreted it as Cnut's great respect for Canterbury to allow the monks to elect one of their own.⁴⁹ There is also some indication that Æthelnoth and Cnut were on good terms before the monk was raised to the archbishopric.⁵⁰ In a time when the king made all the episcopal appointments, personally knowing the ruler, even during the age of the reform, must have helped in higher preferment. Yet, if Æthelnoth was the son of Ealdorman Æthelmær of the Western Provinces, King Cnut may have influenced his 'election' more than Brooks allowed and it suddenly is no longer a simple case of the king appointing a favourite. Indeed, his elevation to Canterbury may have been a very precise political move.

Ealdorman Æthelmær was the son of Ealdorman Æthelweard and appears to have had a son and also a son-in-law named Æthelweard. Æthelmær lost his son Æthelweard in Cnut's 1017 purge.⁵¹ If the second Æthelweard mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was indeed the son-in-law of Æthelmær, he may have succeeded his father-in-law as an ealdorman in the west. Cnut exiled this Æthelweard in 1020 for rebellion.⁵² It is impossible to know if all these men were truly related to one another, yet if they were, then Æthelnoth's appointment to Canterbury three years after his brother's execution and roughly six months after his brother-in-law's exile suddenly looks less like royal benevolence towards Christ Church and much more like a move of political appeasement towards a south-west kin group who was potentially strong enough to still cause trouble.

⁴⁷ JW s.a. 1020. Although John of Worcester only writes the Æthelnoth was son of 'the noble man, Æthelmær' [*nobilis viri Ægelmari*], Timothy Bolton provides a good explanation why we can assume that this Æthelmær is the same as the man mentioned in annal for the year 1017. See T. Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden; Boston, 2009), p. 81.

⁴⁸ Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, p. 291.

⁴⁹ Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, p. 258.

⁵⁰ Bolton, *Empire of Cnut*, pp. 80-81. Bolton cites Osbern's *vita* of Ælfsige for this view.

⁵¹ See JW s.a. 1017 and ASC DE s.a. 1017.

⁵² See ASC DE s.a. 1020 and S. Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', in *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. A. Rumble (London, 1994), pp. 44-83 (pp. 67-70). Keynes traces how it is known that Æthelmær had a son-in-law named Æthelweard.

Still, Æthelnoth's appointment remains unique, not only because of his direct elevation but because he represents a break in the pattern set by Edgar and continued by Æthelred of appointing abbots of reformed monasteries—who had gained experience at another episcopal sees—to the archbishopric.⁵³ Indeed, only three more men followed Æthelnoth as archbishop of Canterbury during the Anglo-Saxon period: Eadsige, Robert of Jumièges and Stigand. Both Eadsige and Robert were technically monks but their appointments, along with that of Stigand's, appear to have more to do with their association with the king and his court than interest in the spiritual wealth fare of the Anglo-Saxon church. Even Edgar's promotion of men like Dunstan to the archbishopric, while motivated by spiritual concerns, can still be interpreted as a deliberate royal strategy to produce something that the king wanted: a reformed Anglo-Saxon church.

Despite the interesting connections that can be made to Æthelnoth and to a lesser extent Ælfric and Dunstan, the kin background of the majority of bishops is uncertain at best and generally undocumented. Even immediate family members often went unnamed if not unrecorded. Sisters especially often remained anonymous. Each documented sister of the bishops and archbishops under consideration appears to have been a married layperson. Although some female siblings received estates or appear as substantial land owners in their own right, they remain shadowy figures.⁵⁴ Specifically for Canterbury, Ælfric alone has documented sisters. Known only from his will, the bishop's sisters and their offspring received two manors from the bishop.⁵⁵ Female siblings' existence does raise several questions, especially in the case of men like Archbishop Ælfric, who was not the only male of his family to enter the Church. As mentioned above, both Ælfric and his brother Leofric became monks and successive abbots of St. Albans. A question that must

⁵³ This is not to say that I do not believe many of the other men under consideration may have potentially gained access to the court and thus to abbacies and bishoprics because of family connections. Rather, their appointment to the archbishopric appears to have more to do with their monastic pedigree than strictly their familial background.

⁵⁴ M. F. Smith, 'Archbishop Stigand and the Eye of the Needle', in *Anglo-Norman Studies, XVI: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1993*, ed. M. Chibnall (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1994), pp. 199-219 (p. 200). Domesday Book reveals that Stigand's unnamed sister as substantial landowner in Norfolk.

⁵⁵ *Wills*, no. 18.

be pursued here is why both male children were placed in the church but the daughters were married. Four possibilities can be considered likely. First, that there were more siblings existed but went unrecorded including sisters who entered the church. Secondly, that these clergymen's sisters survive in records not because of their own family's importance, but because of their marriage to prominent men.⁵⁶ Thirdly, that the church offered the only way for the sons to achieve some sort of higher position, or fourthly, that there were additional sons within the family who never achieved a national status like their ecclesiastical brothers and thus went unrecorded. Each of these possibilities or a combination of them suggests a familial strategy for gaining status and political power. The final possibility also indicates that at least some of these bishops, while not coming from the upper echelons of the aristocracy, may have come from families wealthy enough to have a son to inherit and to marry their daughters to important men but not to support additional sons. Forward-thinking families in the late tenth century probably began to place their sons in monasteries which had royal patronage and abbots who had access to the royal court and councils. Places where perhaps their sons would be taken and come to the attention of the reform leaders or, more importantly, the king. The number of monks appointed to bishoprics, particularly to Canterbury in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, may have encouraged such a strategy.

Ecclesiastical Status and Higher Preferment

Mary Frances Smith has discussed the marked increase of the appointment of monks to episcopal sees during this period, a tendency which remained—despite the decline of the reform movement itself—until the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066).⁵⁷ The episcopal lists of Canterbury between 950-1050 clearly demonstrated this trend. The first three archbishops within this period were the secular clerics Oda, Ælfsige, and Byrthelm

⁵⁶ I hesitate to put too much emphasis on this possibility since at least Stigand's sister appears to hold land in her own right in Domesday Book. Her estates centred in the same area as those estates which belonged to her ecclesiastical brothers.

⁵⁷ See Smith, 'Preferment', 159-74.

(although Oda took monastic vows at some point).⁵⁸ Byrthelm was later demoted back to the bishopric of Wells in favour of the future saint Dunstan. The six men who followed Dunstan at Canterbury all belonged to monastic communities and the first five also held abbacies. Eadsige, the seventh archbishop of Canterbury after Dunstan, began his career as one of Cnut's royal priests. Through a complicated series of land grants between Eadsige and Christ Church, Canterbury and apparently with the king's approval, the royal priest became a member of the community. The land agreement appears to have given Eadsige and his brother a consolidated territorial base and the Christ Church community a major acquisition of estates as long as they supported Eadsige when he gained the archbishopric.⁵⁹ This situation, in and of itself, indicates the almost stranglehold that men from monastic backgrounds had on the top ecclesiastical positions, that a clerk from the royal household needed to join a monastery in order to ensure his place as the next archbishop. It was not until Edward the Confessor appointed Stigand to the archbishopric in 1052 that a cleric from a fully secular background once again held the see of Canterbury.

Despite the fact that Canon law prohibited transferring sees, only one of the eleven archbishops of Canterbury under discussion held no other episcopal position.⁶⁰ While my survey reveals no clear favoured episcopal position from which the king chose his archbishops,⁶¹ it does seem to indicate a marked preference for those originally appointed to one of the West Saxon dioceses of Ramsbury, Wells, and Winchester. Oda,

⁵⁸ Oda, archbishop 941-958, at some point took monastic vows at Fleury but the date of these vows is uncertain and may even have happened after he was appointed to the archbishopric. See Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, pp. 222-3.

⁵⁹ Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, p. 295. It appears he became a monk in or around 1035 and from 1035 until his predecessor's (Æthelnoth) death in 1038 acted as a suffragan to the archbishopric under the title bishop of St. Martin's, Canterbury.

⁶⁰ These uncanonical transfers required the archbishops to travel to Rome to secure their *pallium* from the pope and help explain certain absences early in most of their episcopal tenures. This idea may have come from the fifteenth decree at the First Council of Nicaea which declares: 'Neither bishops nor presbyters nor deacons shall transfer from city to city (*civitatem*). If after this decision. . . anyone shall attempt such a thing. . . the arrangement shall be totally annulled, and he shall be restored to the church of which he was ordained bishop or presbyter or deacon'. See *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. N. P. Tanner (London, 1990), p. 13.

⁶¹ For example there is nothing similar to the York-Worcester connection which develops for Canterbury.

Sigeric, and Ælfric all held Ramsbury before Canterbury, Byrthelm and Lyfing (Ælfstan) occupied Wells and Ælfsige and Ælfheah both held Winchester before the archbishopric. Thus seven of the ten who held a previous episcopal see occupied a bishopric in Wessex. Æthelgar and Eadsige also administered southern sees, Selsey and St. Martin's, Canterbury respectively. In fact, Dunstan occupied the most northerly see among the archbishops under consideration, that of Worcester, which he held in plurality with the bishopric of London.⁶²

Æthelgar, Eadsige and Dunstan all provide interesting case studies in themselves. Æthelgar held Selsey in plurality with the abbacy of New Minster—another bishop connected to Winchester.⁶³ Cnut essentially handpicked Eadsige as the successor to Æthelnoth and the former royal priest received a suffragan position at St. Martin's Canterbury. Dunstan, as mentioned above, was a pluralist. Of these eleven men, only Æthelnoth was raised directly to the archbishopric, his highest office before his appointment was dean of Christ Church, Canterbury.⁶⁴ While Æthelnoth's background remained uncertain, as we have seen, his family history may have influenced his appointment and may also explain why, unlike his predecessors and successors, he did not occupy an episcopal see before he became the archbishop of Canterbury.

Having experience, perhaps proving their skills and usefulness as royal agents, was probably important to being raised to the archbishopric. While the appointments for the most part do seem to be the king's choice, the number of successive abbots who received episcopal preferment between 959-1020 perhaps also indicates that an original strategy by Edgar may have become a habit or even an expectation forced upon his successors. Royal favour, time spent at court, and effective diocesan administration probably influenced the king's decision in his appointments to the metropolitan sees more

⁶² Stigand also came to Canterbury via Winchester.

⁶³ S. Kelly, 'The Bishopric of Selsey', in *Chichester Cathedral: An Historical Survey*, ed. M. Hobbs (Chichester, 1994), pp. 1-10 (p. 8).

⁶⁴ Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, p. 290.

than family ties alone could. Yet, the questions remain as to how these men received abbacies and bishoprics in the first place and how they come to the king's attention. Examining the prelates of Worcester and Winchester and how they gained their sees will help to answer these questions. The first question, as with Canterbury, however, is the identity of these men.

WORCESTER⁶⁵

Originally called the diocese of the Hwicce after the ancient Anglo-Saxon kingdom that once occupied the area around the city of Worcester, the bishop was not titled 'of Worcester' until the mid-tenth century.⁶⁶ Multiple bishops who became national figures both in ecclesiastical and political matters occupied this western diocese. As one of the few ecclesiastical centres that preserved documents from the Anglo-Saxon period in a significant number, scholars can study the see of Worcester to a greater degree than most Anglo-Saxon dioceses.

Based on the number of attestations, as a group between 950-1050, the bishops of Worcester appear to have attended the royal court on a fairly regular basis but by no means at all times.⁶⁷ These numbers could occur for several reasons, although I think there are two most likely. First, the distance he needed to travel to reach court and second, whether the bishop needed to attend to other matters. As an example of the latter, Bishop Ealdred, made several trips abroad during his years at Worcester—some on royal business—therefore he could not always attend court. The order at which the bishops attested in the witness lists also proved interesting since they vary from bishop to bishop as well as within each bishop's pontificate. In general, however, most bishops of Worcester attested between third and ninth positions among bishops, although some were

⁶⁵ See Figure 2 for a full list of bishops and their episcopal dates.

⁶⁶ F. Tinti, *Sustaining Belief: The Church of Worcester from c.870 to c.1100* (Farnham, 2010), p. 290.

⁶⁷ Keynes, *Atlas*, Tables XLIV, XLVIIa, XLVIIb, XLVIII, XLIX, LIV, LVIII, LXa, LXb, LXVI, and LXXII.

as low as fifteenth on certain documents.⁶⁸ There does appear to be a possible practice of moving a bishop up the witness list in his last attestation before his move to a metropolitan seat—in the case of Worcester during the period under consideration, this almost always meant York.⁶⁹ This move to the northern metropolitan see, however, does make attestations hard to judge, since so many of the archbishops in this time period also held the see of Worcester in plurality. In fact, Wulfstan I of Worcester does not appear to have attested any royal documents as the bishop of Worcester, although he held the see together with York for fourteen years.⁷⁰ Overall the bishopric of Worcester appears to have had been fairly well represented at the royal court by its prelates. These men did not spend all of their time away from their see and returned home to perform their duties.

Family Connections

Unlike the archbishops of Canterbury discussed above, the bishops of smaller dioceses are often poorly documented. Bishops of sees like Worcester, however, whose backgrounds we can trace, occasionally prove to have interesting familial connections either at the royal court or among other ecclesiastical officials. Even for those men who went on to metropolitan sees, it is often easier to see how they entered the ecclesiastical elite if their initial episcopal appointments are studied. Other bishops remain in anonymity more because of a lack of evidence than genuine political insignificance.

According to Dunstan's earliest biographer B, the future archbishop of Canterbury originally became a member of the royal court as a young man, perhaps through the influence of his brother, Wulfric.⁷¹ If scholars have identified the correct Wulfric, he was probably a royal thegn and given substantial lands in Wiltshire and Surrey from kings Edmund and Eadred. He also appears to have been the reeve of Glastonbury Abbey's

⁶⁸ Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LXXII.

⁶⁹ This upward movement perhaps can be seen as a sign of the royal favour to come. For examples see Figure 4.

⁷⁰ Wulfstan I of Worcester was also Wulfstan II of York (1002-1023), not to be confused Wulfstan II of Worcester (1062-1095).

⁷¹ *ODNB*, 'Dunstan', Michael Lapidge [accessed 9 December 2011].

estates during the early part of Dunstan's abbacy, which may be one reason for Dunstan's original appointment to that particular monastery.⁷² Dunstan's family also appears to have been centred in the area around Glastonbury and several of his family members who also entered the Church may have studied or even become monks at Glastonbury which may also have influenced his appointment there.⁷³ Dunstan apparently came to the attention of King Æthelstan—probably through Æthelhelm, bishop of Wells.⁷⁴ The king encouraged him to become a priest and Dunstan received ordination from his uncle, Bishop Ælfheah of Winchester, and eventually also took monastic vows. Dunstan may have had a kinship link (degree uncertain) to Cynesige, bishop of Lichfeld and Æthelhelm, bishop of Wells and eventually archbishop of Canterbury.⁷⁵ If Dunstan had familial links with all of these prelates, these relationships may have provided an incentive or even pressure for him to join the clergy, not only as a family practice or expectation of a younger son but also as a means of social and political advancement as evidenced by the substantial success of his kin.

Oswald also possessed a familial network of high-ranking church officials including Archbishops Oscytel and Oda as well as Abbot Thurcytel of Bedford.⁷⁶ Oda appears to have overseen his nephew's initial education and sent Oswald to Fleury to learn proper monastic practices.⁷⁷ While his *vita* indicates that Dunstan suggested Oswald to the king for the vacant see of Worcester, his candidacy may have involved more than just his association with three powerful churchmen and monastic training at Fleury.⁷⁸ The archbishop's paternal side stands in sharp contrast to his maternal one. His father's side

⁷² ODNB, 'Dunstan', Michael Lapidge [accessed 9 December 2011].

⁷³ B. Yorke, 'Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century', in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. B. Yorke (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1988), pp. 89-118 (pp. 66-67).

⁷⁴ W. Stubbs, *Memorials of Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1874), p. 55. One *Life of Dunstan* claims that the future saint joined Æthelhelm's household before his introduction to Æthelstan's royal court.

⁷⁵ ODNB, 'Dunstan', Michael Lapidge [accessed 9 December 2011].

⁷⁶ ODNB, 'Oswald', N.P. Brooks [accessed 9 December 2011].

⁷⁷ ODNB, 'Oswald', N.P. Brooks [accessed 9 December 2011].

⁷⁸ VSO, iii.5: 'Dunstan sought from the mighty King Edgar that a bishopric of apostolic dignity be given to Oswald, because one was vacant in Worcester; Dunstan obtained this from the king by means of a gentle petition.'

which included Oda, Oscytel, and Thurcytel, consisted of an Anglo-Danish family based in East Anglia with multiple connections to the Church.⁷⁹ The same clarity cannot be applied to his mother's family although all scholars agree that she appears to have links to Mercia. Whether she herself was Mercian or, as Andrew Wareham has suggested she married into a Mercian family after her marriage to Oswald's father ended, is uncertain.⁸⁰ She did provide Oswald with a network in the Midlands full of laymen bearing English names—as opposed to churchmen bearing Scandinavian names on his father's side. This network, whether maternal blood kin or stepfather's family (or both) may have influenced Dunstan and Edgar's decision to appoint Oswald to Worcester more than his *Life* indicates.⁸¹ The king may have liked Oswald's pedigree and paternal connections but the network provided by the monk's mother in the diocese where he received preferment cannot be ignored or taken as mere coincidence. Oswald's successors—Lyfing and Ealdred—in the eleventh century demonstrate what could happen at the diocesan level when the bishop did not or could not create his own local power base.

Although we cannot trace other bishops' kin-groups as easily as those of Oswald and Dunstan, some interesting facts emerge about several other Worcester prelates. Hugh Candidus records that Ealdwulf was King Edgar's lay chancellor (*cancellarius*).⁸² Like other specific details found in post-Conquest texts, this statement must be treated with caution. Still, if Ealdwulf had connections with the royal court it may explain why this particular abbot of Peterborough received an episcopal see. Wulfstan I's background also remains uncertain but scholars do know that he was the maternal uncle of Brihtheah, his successor but one at Worcester.⁸³ Like other bishops' sisters, Brihtheah's mother remained anonymous, although she appeared in a marriage agreement with a

⁷⁹ A. Wareham, 'Saint Oswald's Family and Kin', in *St Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. N. Brooks and C. Cubitt (London, 1996), pp. 46-63 (pp. 48-49).

⁸⁰ Wareham, 'Family and Kin', p. 56.

⁸¹ Wareham, 'Family and Kin', p. 56.

⁸² Hugh Candidus, *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus, a Monk of Peterborough* (London 1949), p. 16.

⁸³ Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, p. 44.

Gloucestershire thegn, Wulfric.⁸⁴ Because both Peterborough and Ely honoured Wulfstan in their records and that the name ‘Wulfstan’ commonly occurs in aristocratic families associated with both monasteries, Patrick Wormald suggested that Wulfstan may have come from one of these families.⁸⁵ Wormald also noted that Ealdwulf, a former abbot of Peterborough, and the direct predecessor to Wulfstan I at both Worcester and York as support for his claim that the bishop belonged to a aristocratic family associated with the great reformed monasteries of eastern England. If Wormald’s suggestion is correct it might explain why Wulfstan’s sister married a thegn of Wulfric’s apparent standing; he promised her several lands scattered throughout Worcestershire in their marriage agreement.⁸⁶ Finally, more tenuously it has been suggested that Lyfing and Ealdred may have been relatives.⁸⁷ Both appear to have early career links to Winchester (quite possibly monks) and followed each other as successive abbots of Tavistock and bishops of Worcester. In fact, Ealdred may well have acted as Lyfing’s suffragan in Worcester starting in 1044.⁸⁸ Both emerged as good administrators and became highly involved in the politics of their day. This connection, while interesting, has no solid documentation and the career paths and occupational traits these two men shared may have just been similar talents found among successful prelates rather than family resemblances.

On a final note concerning the family connections of these eleven bishops of Worcester, while the majority of these men came from reformed monastic backgrounds, this did not preclude them from breaking church laws. Several were pluralists and others may have promoted kinsmen (Lyfing) or used relatives to gain ecclesiastical positions

⁸⁴ Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, p. 41. Scholars know this was at least her second marriage since Brihtheah witnessed this particular marriage agreement and may have been a monk at Worcester at the time. Patrick Wormald proposed that this unnamed sister may have been a Wulfgifu who received lands in a lease during Wulfstan’s episcopate. The man who held the lands given in the lease in 1066 was described as ‘Bishop Brihtheah’s nephew’, see *ODNB*, ‘Wulfstan’, Patrick Wormald [accessed 9 December 2011]. See *PASE*, Beorhtheah 2.

⁸⁵ *ODNB*, ‘Wulfstan’, Patrick Wormald [accessed 9 December 2011].

⁸⁶ See S 1459.

⁸⁷ V. King, ‘Ealdred, Archbishop of York: The Worcester Years’, in *Anglo-Norman Studies, XVIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1995*, ed. C. Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 123-38 (p. 23).

⁸⁸ Although Lyfing died in 1046, Ealdred started attesting documents as *episcopus* in 1044. See Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LXXII.

(Dunstan, Oswald). Yet, perhaps one of the most surprising actions by these reforming bishops was not an act that went against canon law but rather deeds that essentially belonged to the aristocratic class. Oswald, Wulfstan, and Brihtheah leased multiple episcopal estates to kinsmen and women. For example, Oswald leased land in Worcestershire to his nephew Ælfwine, one among several relatives.⁸⁹ Oswald may also have had at least one brother since William of Malmesbury records he had a nephew, whether this nephew and Ælfwine are the same person is unclear.⁹⁰ Besides his anonymous sister and her husband Wulfric who were landholders in Worcestershire, Wulfstan also had a brother Ælfwig to whom he leased land in the same county. Finally Brihtheah had a brother Æthelric and anonymous sister and brother-in-law who all appeared as landholders in Worcestershire.

While many of the Worcester bishops were promoters of the tenth-century reform, their actions in regards to landed wealth, provide almost a dichotomy of character. On the one side is the reform-minded monk, on the other is, to borrow Nicholas Brooks' phrase, 'the acquisitiveness of a noble'. The almost systematic leasing out of estates by certain bishops to their kinsmen demonstrates an aristocratic-like strategy concerning land. While perhaps not acquisition on the scale of the eleventh-century Godwinesons, these leases would affect the episcopal estates of Worcester throughout the rest of the Anglo-Saxon period. Vanessa King has discussed this stranglehold on church estates by members of previous bishops' relatives, particularly Wulfstan and Brihtheah's family in regards to Lyfing's and Ealdred's episcopates. While discussing the multiple sees both Lyfing and Ealdred acquired and how their duties as royal agents undoubtedly affected their ability to steadily oversee and make changes to the diocese of Worcester, King noted:

The social and tenorial structure which existed on Worcester estates had long since been formed. . . comparisons of the lay witnesses of the leases of both Lyfing and Ealdred covering the period 1038x1053 also adds weight to this theory. These men or their descendants figure prominently as TRE tenants of the

⁸⁹ For Ælfwine see S 1355.

⁹⁰ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* (Oxford, 2007), iii.15.1.

bishop in Domesday Book. Thus, there may have been little opportunity for outsiders, like Lyfing and Ealdred, to introduce their own men and make their mark.⁹¹

When King mentions ‘these men or their descendants’ she refers to known members of the Wulfstan and Brihtheah family.⁹² Particularly since these bishops appear to have made use of both their male and female relatives, a comparison arises to aristocrats who received offices to oversee an area where they lacked a power base. Unlike Harold Godwinson in East Anglia or Byrhtnoth in Essex who started as outsiders but married into powerful local families, bishops could not just merge with a local kin group.⁹³ Both lay and ecclesiastical leaders needed a power base to be effective as royal and local agents and as demonstrated by several of the bishops of Worcester, if a prelate could not personally join a local family perhaps he married sisters into them instead or built his own power base using imported family members.

Ecclesiastical Status and Higher Preferment

As with the archbishopric of Canterbury, the Benedictine reform affected the see of Worcester. Although the community did not originate as a monastic house, its conversion to a monastery began under Oswald.⁹⁴ Of the eleven men who held Worcester in the period under consideration nine of them have documented monastic backgrounds, of these nine, six previously held abbacies.⁹⁵ Many of these men became major leaders in the Benedictine reform or possessed some connection to these leaders, often emerging among the first abbots of the newly (re)founded monasteries.

⁹¹ King, ‘Ealdred’, p. 137.

⁹² Ann Williams, ‘An Introduction to Worcester Domesday’, in *The Worcestershire Domesday*, ed. A. Williams and R.W.H. Erskine (London, 1988), pp. 1-31.

⁹³ Harold Godwinson had a ‘handfast’ marriage with Edith, a wealthy landowner in East Anglia. Byrhtnoth married Ælflæd, who was the second daughter of Ælfgar, ealdorman of Essex. Ælfgar preceded Byrhtnoth but one as ealdorman of the region, but unlike Byrhtnoth, his family appears to have been based in Essex. Ælfgar’s family was important enough that King Edmund I took his eldest daughter, Æthelflæd, as his second wife.

⁹⁴ Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, pp. 25-26. There is some debate over whether this was a gradual or swift change.

⁹⁵ See Figure 2.

No surviving documentation for Cenwald and Wulfstan I indicates anything about a monastic background. Cenwald was a secular cleric and, because of his association with King Æthelstan, probably a royal chaplain.⁹⁶ His appointment as head of the expedition which escorted the king's half-sisters to Germany in 929 as potential brides of the future Otto I reveals his closeness to the ruler. While he journeyed on the continent, Cenwald stopped at several monasteries which record his generous gifts and his request for prayers for many people, particularly Æthelstan.⁹⁷ Despite his secular background Cenwald took monastic vows at some point after his episcopal appointment; in fact in four charters dated between 949 and 956 he is described as *monachus* in the witness lists although he appears among other contemporary bishops.⁹⁸ Turning to Wulfstan I, he remains one of the most well-known medieval bishops of Worcester and a promoter of church reform, yet scholars have no documentary proof that Wulfstan ever took monastic vows himself.⁹⁹ If Wulfstan never became a monk, he would be the only bishop of Worcester between c. 958 and the end of the Anglo-Saxon period who had not taken monastic vows.¹⁰⁰ In a time when the Anglo-Saxon kings tended to appoint monks instead of secular clerics to bishoprics, the ambiguity of monastic status makes Wulfstan an interesting outlier. Indeed, Worcester continued to be administered by monk-bishops throughout Edward the Confessor's reign although he became the first king since Edgar to reverse the trend of appointing men from monastic backgrounds to the episcopacy.¹⁰¹

The bishops of Worcester who did come from monastic backgrounds form an impressive group. Cenwald's successors included Dunstan (957x958-959) and Oswald (961-992) two of the three leading men of the tenth-century reform in England. Dunstan became the Archbishop of Canterbury and Oswald received the archbishopric of York.

⁹⁶ See Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, p. 15.

⁹⁷ Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, pp. 15-17.

⁹⁸ Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, p. 16.

⁹⁹ For discussion see Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁰ Cenwald technically was a monk when he died in 957 or 958 but since he was a secular cleric upon his actual appointment to Worcester, I have decided to count him in this category rather than as a monastic bishop.

¹⁰¹ Smith, 'Preferment', 161.

Oswald retained Worcester in plurality with York thus laying the foundation for a long and tangled association between the two sees which would last past the Conquest.¹⁰² Ealdwulf helped rebuild Peterborough (upon the advice of Bishop Æthelwold, the third leader of the reform) eventually becoming abbot there before his appointment to the see of Worcester.¹⁰³ Leofsige became abbot of Thorney, refounded by Æthelwold, before receiving the bishopric of Worcester and Brihteah held the abbacy of Pershore—a monastery rebuilt by Oswald during his time as bishop of Worcester—before his episcopal appointment. Thus, both of these men came from very strong reformed monastic backgrounds with direct connections to the leaders of the reform movement itself.¹⁰⁴ Of the final three bishops in the period under consideration, Lyfing and Ealdred were both abbots of Tavistock—as well as possibly kinsmen—before holding Worcester and Ælfric Puttoc acted as the provost of New Minster, Winchester before his appointment to the archbishopric of York.¹⁰⁵ Ælfric, in a reverse of the previous trend was appointed to the archbishopric and then given the see of Worcester. He only held Worcester for a year while Lyfing remained under suspicion for being involved in Alfred the ætheling's death.¹⁰⁶ Overall the diocese of Worcester was given into the care of monk-bishops, most of whom either emerged at the forefront of the Benedictine reform or enjoyed a connection to the movement's leaders. Even when the pendulum swung back towards appointing secular clerics to bishoprics, Worcester remained a stronghold of monastic bishops.

In contrast to the English archbishoprics, offices generally staffed by prelates who had held at least one previous bishopric, Worcester remained the first if not the only

¹⁰² See A. Williams, 'The Cunning of the Dove: Wulfstan and the Politics of Accommodation', in *St Wulfstan and his World*, ed. J. S. Barrow and N. P. Brooks (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 23-38.

¹⁰³ *ODNB*, 'Ealdwulf' [accessed 12 December 2011]. Æthelwold advised Ealdwulf, a layman, after the accidental suffocation of his child to rebuild Peterborough in reparation. Ealdwulf rebuilt the monastery and then joined it as a monk.

¹⁰⁴ Brihteah is also noteworthy because he was the nephew of Wulfstan I.

¹⁰⁵ *ODNB*, 'Lyfing', 'Ealdred', and 'Ælfric Puttoc' [accessed 12 December 2011]. See *PASE*, Lyfing 15, Ealdred 37, and Ælfric 105.

¹⁰⁶ *ODNB*, 'Ælfric Puttoc' [accessed 12 December 2011].

episcopal seat its bishops held. Only Wulfstan I, Lyfing, and Ælfric Puttoc had episcopal status before Worcester. Wulfstan held the bishopric of London, Lyfing became a pluralist holding Crediton and Cornwall together and, as mentioned above, Ælfric was archbishop of York. Dunstan may also have held the bishopric of London before Worcester, although he held both in plurality regardless of the order in which he received the appointments.¹⁰⁷ Looking more closely at Lyfing's preferment for a moment, he held Crediton, Cornwall, and Worcester all together from 1038 to 1040 and again starting in 1041 to 1046. Lyfing probably possessed Crediton and Cornwall together because both were extremely poor dioceses. On a side note, we should for a moment ponder who would want to oversee either of these dioceses given their poor monetary value and distance from the royal court. Dunstan apparently refused the bishopric of Crediton in 952 or 953 on the grounds that he did not think himself worthy of such high office.¹⁰⁸ For a man who spent much of his adult life at the royal court we should not pass off his refusal only as pious humility.

Since Lyfing remained active in the politics of his day, he probably received the richer see of Worcester as a reward for services later in his career. He lost Worcester a year later when he became implicated in the death of Alfred the ætheling along with Earl Godwine—although he retained his two earlier sees. One of his accusers may have been Archbishop Ælfric Puttoc who benefited from this when he received Worcester from the king after he had deprived Lyfing of it.¹⁰⁹ Ælfric Puttoc, like previously archbishops, probably sought a way to supplement his poorer metropolitan see. Lyfing, however, was cleared of all charges and received Worcester back the following year.

Of the remaining seven men, Ealdwulf, Leofsige, Brihtheah, and Ealdred all held the abbacies of reformed monasteries. Cenwald may have earned his appointment through

¹⁰⁷ There is debate over which see he was given first, B., author of the earliest *vita* of Dunstan, claims he received Worcester first, but modern scholars believe his initial appointment was to London. See Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁸ ODNB, 'Dunstan', Michale Lapidge [accessed 12 December 2011].

¹⁰⁹ Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, p. 50.

connections at the royal court¹¹⁰ and Oswald appears to have received preferment because of the influence of Dunstan.¹¹¹ While Worcester was the first appointment for most of these men, six of them went on to (or already possessed) a metropolitan see. There was obviously a marked preference for bishops who held Worcester to eventually become archbishop of York. Between 971 and 1016 three successive bishops held the see of Worcester before receiving York.¹¹² All three held both sees in plurality until Wulfstan I was forced to resign Worcester in 1016. When the king deprived Lyfing of Worcester for a year, the see went to the archbishop of York and from what scholars can draw from the sources, Ealdred fully intended to hold Worcester in plurality with York.¹¹³ It was only after Ealdred returned from Rome with his *pallium* that he relinquished Worcester at the insistence of the pope.¹¹⁴ While the majority of these men came from reformed monastic background and several served as abbots of reformed monasteries, their familial and court connections should not be ignored. Indeed, as already discussed Oswald gained Worcester through introductions made by his kinsmen if not also a local support network of kin he could rely on; a network probably already in place in the west Midlands. Although Dunstan probably did not receive Worcester strictly because of his familial connections, he does appear to owe his introduction to the royal court to them. Finally, too many connections exist amongst this list of bishops to their predecessors or the reform's leaders to not speculate that many came to the attention of the king through the suggestion of men like Dunstan, Oswald, and Æthelwold, if not through actual introductions at court, while perhaps serving in one of these bishops' retinues. We should

¹¹⁰ Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, p. 15. I am basing this assumption on his apparent close relationship with King Æthelstan. It was Cenwald who escorted the king's half-nieces to Germany as potential brides of the future Otto I.

¹¹¹ Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, p. 20.

¹¹² Wulfstan I was technically appointed to both Worcester and York at the same time.

¹¹³ It appears that Ealdred appointed his successor at Worcester Wulfstan II because he was envisioning Wulfstan acting in more of a suffragan role than as full bishop. Wulfstan II did not have access to all the episcopal manors of Worcester until after Ealdred's death. See Williams, 'Cunning of the Dove', p. 25.

¹¹⁴ Ealdred was originally denied the *pallium*. See Williams, 'Cunning of the Dove', p. 25.

consider this a distinct possibility since bishops were just as likely as aristocrats and kings to surround themselves with their favourites.

WINCHESTER¹¹⁵

Winchester was an important city throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Extant sources indicate the existence of a royal residence in the city by the ninth century if not before and this royally favoured urban centre often acted as the site of the few annual crown-wearing ceremonies.¹¹⁶ Multiple meetings of the *witan* took place at or near Winchester, evidence exists that it became a depository for the royal treasure and the favoured burial place of many kings from Alfred's line.¹¹⁷ The wealth of the diocese reflected the prominence of the city; this wealth combined with Winchester's proximity to the meeting places of the royal court enabled the prelates regularly to attend the king. The see seems to have been held in high esteem since its bishops, even as junior members of the episcopate, rarely attested below the tenth position and generally appear in the first five of any document they witnessed.¹¹⁸ Like Worcester and Canterbury, Winchester became a monastic cathedral during the Benedictine reform. Unlike the gradual transition that occurred at Worcester and Canterbury, Winchester's secular clerics found themselves forcibly expelled in 964 under the reforming fervour of Æthelwold.¹¹⁹ Probably because of its location in the heart of the West Saxon realm, several of the bishops appointed to the bishopric of Winchester appear to have had the patronage if not blood kingship to members of the royal family, especially the king or queen.

¹¹⁵ See Figure 3 for the full list of bishops and their episcopal years.

¹¹⁶ F. Barlow and M. Biddle, *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages: An Edition and Discussion of the Winton Domesday* (Oxford, 1976), p. 308.

¹¹⁷ Barlow and Biddle, *Winchester*, p. 290.

¹¹⁸ See Keynes, *Atlas*, Tables XLIV, XLVIIa, XLVIIb, XLVIII, XLIX, LIV, LVIII, LXa, LXb, LXVI, and LXXII.

¹¹⁹ ASC s.a. 964.

Family Connections

Many Winchester bishops' backgrounds are uncertain but the familial connections which are traceable provide insights into what kind of men were appointed to this particular see. One of the most fascinating is Ælfheah I.¹²⁰ As discussed above, at King Æthelstan's request, Ælfheah ordained his kinsman, Dunstan, and Æthelwold to the priesthood on the same day.¹²¹ Simon Keynes has argued that Ælfheah I served as a royal cleric in Æthelstan's court before his episcopal appointment.¹²² If Keynes has correctly identified this bishop as the same Ælfheah 'priest and monk' who witnessed a charter on Æthelstan's coronation day then he differs from other royal priests already mentioned in that he was a monk while serving at the court.¹²³ Barbara Yorke has argued that Ælfheah's family possibly had familial connections to Æthelstan possibly through the king's mother.¹²⁴ Ælfheah's potential kinship to the king may explain his service as a royal cleric as well as his appointment to this particular see.

Winchester was a key city in the opposition against Æthelstan succeeding his father, Edward the Elder, in favour of his younger half-brothers—Ælfweard and Edwin. Æthelstan did not spend as much time in Winchester, particularly in the early years of his reign, as his predecessors or successors did which may indicate that tensions still existed between the king and the city.¹²⁵ Once the see became vacant, Æthelstan filled this prominent bishopric with two successive priests from his royal household, Beorstan and Ælfheah. In Ælfheah's case, this appointment must especially have eased Æthelstan's mind in regards to the city of Winchester. If the king had a kinship with Ælfheah's family

¹²⁰ ODNB, 'Oda', Catherine Cubitt and Marios Costambeys [accessed 12 December 2011]. Ælfheah apparently was part of a group with Oda, archbishop of Canterbury (941-958) and Cenwald, bishop of Worcester (928x928- 957x958) whose actions were precursors to Dunstan, Oswald, and Æthelwold's attempts at widespread reform. See *PASE*, Oda 1, Ælfheah 19, and Cenwald 5.

¹²¹ *VSÆ*, ch. 8.

¹²² Keynes, 'Regenbald', 191 n43.

¹²³ He was possibly part of the Glastonbury community before becoming a royal priest. See Yorke, 'Politics of the Tenth Century', p. 66.

¹²⁴ Yorke, 'Politics of the Tenth Century', p. 67.

¹²⁵ Foot, *Æthelstan*, pp. 39-41 and 81.

then Æthelstan had installed not only a loyal royal priest but also a kinsman into a prominent see which had initially opposed him as king.

Other bishops of Winchester possessed interesting family ties. Ælfsige I appears to have had connections to the Wessex aristocracy. In fact Ælfheah, brother of Ealdorman Ælfhere, was named executor of his will.¹²⁶ This particular bishop appears to have fathered a son, probably Godwine of Worthy, named ‘Bishop Ælfsige’s son’ by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which noted his death fighting against the Vikings in annal 1001.¹²⁷ Godwine may have been the ‘kinsman’ Ælfsige bequeathed several estates to in his will.¹²⁸ The bishop left lands to an unnamed kinswoman—believed to actually be the mother of his child. He also bequeathed estates which had belonged to his father to his kinsman and an unnamed sister.¹²⁹ If Ælfsige had connections to the Wessex aristocracy, it might indicate that he himself came from a aristocratic family and thus had connections at court which may have brought him to the king’s attention. It remains unknown but, given the degree of criticism heaped upon him by later writers, it is very unlikely Ælfsige ever took monastic vows.¹³⁰ Given his connections with high-ranking nobility and his own potential aristocratic background, the possibility exists that he, like Ælfheah I, acted a royal cleric before his appointment to the prestigious see of Winchester.

Brihthelm, one of the hardest bishops to identify, appears to have possessed a very intriguing familial network. Several different interpretations exist of who Brihthelm was and how many bishops of that name were active in the 950s and 960s. Three charters name a cleric—later bishop—bearing the name Brihthelm as a relative of two successive kings. One document calls him a relative of Eadwig and the other two a relation of

¹²⁶ S. Jayakumar, ‘Eadwig and Edgar: Politics, Propaganda, Faction’, in *Edgar, King of the English 959-975*, ed. D. Scragg (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2008), pp. 83-103 (p. 85).

¹²⁷ See ASC A s.a. 1001: ‘Godwine æt Worðige, Ælfsiges bisceopes sunu’.

¹²⁸ See *Wills*, no. 4.

¹²⁹ *Wills*, no. 4. Whether this sister was married or not is unknown.

¹³⁰ See Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture*, ch. 1 for a discussion of the trope of the good monastic bishop and sinful secular bishop which developed in late Anglo-Saxon and post-Conquest writings.

Edgar.¹³¹ He appears to have attended the royal court as a cleric during Eadwig's reign until his appointment to bishop.¹³² The exact nature of his connection to the royal family and the exact identity of his closest relatives remains unknown. Patrick Wormald suggested that Bishop Brihthelm of Selsey was the royal kinsman. Wormald further proposed that Brihthelm of Selsey along with his relative, King Eadwig, may have executed a complicated deal with the then bishop of Winchester, Ælfsige, (951-958). The agreement appears to have induced Ælfsige to release all claims Winchester might have had on the bishopric of Selsey in exchange for the promise of the archbishopric of Canterbury upon the current archbishop's (Oda) death. To further complicate matters, the king may have promised Brihthelm the wealthier see of Winchester once he had elevated Ælfsige to Canterbury.¹³³ The episcopal preferment of Ælfsige and Brihthelm, to Canterbury and Winchester respectively, after the death of Oda lends weight to this suggestion. If the Selsey Brihthelm was the royal kinsman, Eadwig, like Æthelstan before him, placed a relative in the prestigious and influential see of Winchester. The political climate of Eadwig's court makes this move especially interesting as his younger brother, Edgar, had started to challenge his rule.

Edgar allowed Brihthelm to remain bishop of Winchester after his ascension to the throne of all England in 959 but appointed his own candidate once Brihthelm had died. The king's choice gave the see to his former tutor, Abbot Æthelwold of Abingdon. Interestingly, Æthelwold was born in Winchester and Barbara Yorke has suggested, based on Æthelwold's ability to refound monasteries like Ely and Thorney which would have required large sums of money, that the reformer came from a wealthy aristocratic

¹³¹ P. Wormald, 'The Strange Affair of the Selsey Bishopric, 953-963', in *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. R. Gameson and H. Leyser (Oxford, 2001), pp. 128-41 (pp. 132-33). See S 615, 683, and 695.

¹³² It actually appears that he was given the title 'bishop' without a see actually being vacant. See Wormald, 'Strange Affair', p. 137.

¹³³ Wormald, 'Strange Affair', pp. 138-39.

family.¹³⁴ Two other accounts found in his *Life* may indicate that Æthelwold came from such a kin-group. First, as a young man Æthelwold joined the royal court before his ordination and may have attested charters in 932 and 934.¹³⁵ Second, starting with his apparent summons to court, various royal family members took an interest in Æthelwold and provided him with patronage; these royals included Æthelstan, Eadred, Eadgifu, Eadwig, and Edgar.¹³⁶ After his ordination, he probably studied under Ælfheah I for a time which would have kept him in contact with the royal court. It may also have allowed him to remain closely linked to his familial network in Winchester. He eventually joined Dunstan at Glastonbury before receiving the abbacy of Abingdon and later the bishopric of Winchester.

Æthelwold's *vita* tends to focus on what its subject did to promote monasticism and ignore his involvement with secular matters. Yet as Yorke has pointed out, Æthelwold remained quite active in such affairs and even supported royal decisions that were questionable in terms of Canon Law—including Eadwig's marriage to Ælfgifu. The senior clergymen later dissolved this particular union because of consanguinity.¹³⁷ Yorke has further argued that Æthelwold's support of Ælfgifu as a legitimate queen and promotion of Edgar's sons from his second marriage over the son from his first were dubious in light of Church teaching but did promote members, or their interests, of an apparent royal kin group descended from King Æthelred I.¹³⁸ This group appears to have included Bishop Brihtelm, Ealdromen Ælfhere and Ælfheah, and they may also have had ties to Eadwig's wife Ælfgifu and Ealdorman Æthelweard. The kin group rose to power during Eadwig's reign at the expense of Æthelstan Half-King's family—a network whose interests were generally supported by Dunstan. Despite sharing a concern for the state of the English Church and sponsorship for the reform movement with Dunstan, Æthelwold

¹³⁴ Yorke, 'Politics of the Tenth Century', p. 65.

¹³⁵ *ODNB*, 'Æthelwold', Barbara Yorke [accessed 12 Decemeber 2011].

¹³⁶ *VSÆ*, ch. 7, 9, 10, 11, and 16.

¹³⁷ Yorke, 'Politics of the Tenth Century', p. 65.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

chose to support this family network even though it put him in political opposition to the archbishop. Several members of this royal kin group were patrons of Abingdon but, this seems a rather weak excuse for a cleric of Æthelwold's apparent strength of character to support a marriage within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity when other bishops denounced it.¹³⁹ This family may also have had a large interest in the see of Winchester since Æthelwold's two immediate predecessors (Ælfsige I and Brihthelm) appear to have connections to the larger kin group.¹⁴⁰ No apparent blood ties emerge between Æthelwold and the family network he chose to aid but their mutual support raises the distinct possibility that there was more association between them than the extant records reveal.

Like Æthelwold, Stigand appears to have come from a wealthy family. Domesday Book recorded his anonymous sister as a substantial landowner in Norfolk and Stigand himself emerged as quite wealthy.¹⁴¹ Stigand probably came to the attention of Cnut and Emma at the royal court. Early in Edward's reign—and most likely through the influence of Emma—Stigand received the East Anglian diocese of Elmham. Although a poor see, his new diocesan seat lay near Stigand's familial power base and allowed him to consolidate his own power. Although briefly deposed while his patroness, Emma, was out of favour with her son, Edward restored Stigand in 1044.¹⁴² In 1047, Edward transferred Stigand to the wealthier see of Winchester and the bishop's brother, Æthelmær became the new bishop of East Anglia. The two brothers would survive the Conquest but lose their bishoprics in William's 1070 purge of the English Church.

Ecclesiastical Status and Higher Preferment

Ten men held the bishopric of Winchester during the period 950-1050.¹⁴³ From the traceable ecclesiastical backgrounds, we can see a trend comparable to Canterbury's

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁴¹ Smith, 'Needle', p. 200.

¹⁴² *ODNB*, 'Stigand', H.E.J. Cowdrey [accessed 12 December 2011]. See *PASE*, Stigand 1.

¹⁴³ See Figure 3.

episcopal succession, a string of monk bishops throughout the late tenth and early eleventh centuries replaced by royal clerics during the reign of Edward the Confessor.

The earliest bishop of Winchester under consideration, Ælfheah I, was almost certainly a monk—his nickname, ‘the Bald’ apparently came from his tonsure.¹⁴⁴ Æthelwold, first served as abbot of Abingdon and then bishop of Winchester.¹⁴⁵ His immediate successors, Ælfheah II and Cenwulf, held the abbacies of Bath and Peterborough, respectively. At Peterborough, Cenwulf succeeded Ealdwulf who, as discussed above, received first the bishopric of Worcester and then archbishopric of Canterbury.¹⁴⁶ Two prestigious appointments for successive abbots indicate that this reformed monastery had strong ties with the monarchy. Thus, Winchester had a fairly strong tradition of bishops from monastic backgrounds or at least those who idealized the monastic life.

Between Ælfheah I and Æthelwold, two bishops of uncertain ecclesiastical backgrounds, Ælfsige I and Brihthelm held Winchester. Ælfsige’s reputation among post-Conquest writers as a depraved cleric is comparable to Stigand.¹⁴⁷ Brihthelm may have served as a royal priest as well as having a familial connection to the king, but the documentation is confusing.¹⁴⁸ After the three monk-bishops Æthelwold, Ælfheah II, and Cenwulf, came two men whose backgrounds remain completely unknown, Æthelwold II and Ælfsige II.¹⁴⁹ Given the monastic background of many other prelates during the early eleventh century it would not prove too surprising if these bishops had also lived as monks before their episcopal appointments. In a break with the trend King Edgar established, the last two men to hold the see of Winchester in the Anglo-Saxon period,

¹⁴⁴ *ODNB*, ‘Dunstan’, Michael Lapidge [accessed 12 December 2011].

¹⁴⁵ Interestingly enough, unlike Dunstan and Oswald, Æthelwold never received a metropolitan see. This situation was complicated by the fact that there were only two archbishoprics in England; each occupied by Dunstan and Oswald, who both outlived Æthelwold. Because there were only two metropolitan sees Æthelwold’s appointment to Winchester (and the fact that he was never transferred to another see) suggests the importance of Winchester as a bishopric in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxons.

¹⁴⁶ *ODNB*, ‘Cenwulf’, William Hunt rev. Henrietta Leyser [accessed 12 December 2011].

¹⁴⁷ *ODNB*, ‘Ælfsige’, Barbara Yorke [accessed 12 December 2011].

¹⁴⁸ Wormald, ‘Strange Affair’, p. 138.

¹⁴⁹ See Figure 3.

Ælfwine and Stigand, were both royal clerics who never took monastic vows. In fact, they both probably obtained the patronage of Queen Emma, which may partly explain their appointments to such an important and wealthy see.¹⁵⁰ The appointment of Ælfwine is especially interesting because it occurred under Cnut who tended to keep the status quo and appoint monks to episcopal sees.¹⁵¹ As Mary Frances Smith has shown, Edward the Confessor discontinued this practice by once again appointing secular clerics to bishoprics in prominent numbers.¹⁵² Cnut's appointment of a royal cleric to the see of Winchester also indicates the significance of this diocese to the king, not only as a wealthy see, but one which existed in the West Saxon heartlands. As we shall see in chapter two, Anglo-Saxon rulers appear to have carefully chosen ealdormen, perhaps more so then in other areas, for the shires in the same region.

Like Worcester, Winchester was the first—if not the only—episcopal appointment for the majority of these clerics. As mentioned above, Æthelwold, Ælfheah II, and Cenwulf all acted as abbots of reformed monasteries. Only Stigand and Brihthelm held bishoprics before their election to Winchester. Besides having episcopal experience before gaining the prestigious see of Winchester, Stigand and Brihthelm also share in the fact that their previous bishoprics, Elmham and Selsey respectively, possessed significantly less wealth and influence.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ See *ODNB*, 'Ælfwine', Emma Mason [accessed 12 December 2011]. Smith, 'Needle', p. 200. Stigand was originally appointed to the much poorer bishopric of Elmham. This diocese's lack of wealth and distance from the royal court probably accounts for the small number of charters Stigand witnessed as bishop of Elmham (as opposed to the large amount he attested as Winchester). The fact that neither Stigand's predecessor nor successor at Elmham attested many documents supports this theory.

¹⁵¹ Cnut only appointed three royal clerics to the episcopate during his entire reign, Ælfwine of Winchester, Duduc of Wells, and Eadsige of St. Martin's. See, Smith, 'Preferment', 161, n17. See *PASE*, Ælfwine 45, Duduc 6, and Eadsige 12.

¹⁵² Smith, 'Preferment', 163.

¹⁵³ See C. Senecal, 'Bishops as Contenders for Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England: The Bishopric of East Anglia and the Regional Aristocracy', in *Negotiating Secular and Ecclesiastical Power: Western Europe in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. A.-J. A. Bijsterveld, H. Teunis, and A. Wareham (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 89-106 and Kelly, 'Bishopric of Selsey', p. 8. Both dioceses were badly damaged by the Viking invasions and struggled to reassert themselves afterwards. The problems they faced, however, were somewhat different. Selsey had to maintain its independence from acquisitive bishops of Winchester. Elmham had to deal with the wealth and power of the Fenland monasteries within its own diocese.

In this survey Winchester emerges as an interesting combination of advancement from monasteries and the royal household. In the cases of Ælfheah I and Æthelwold, preferment appears as a combination of the two. Undoubtedly, this situation arose out of the close association between Winchester and the royal family. Perhaps this connection also provided the see some protection. Unlike Worcester in this period, the bishop of Winchester rarely held another see in plurality. Again it is Brihthelm and Stigand who stand out among their fellow prelates. Because no surviving records name a different bishop of Selsey until right before his death, it appears Brihthelm retained his first see throughout most of his tenure at Winchester.¹⁵⁴ Although more than one bishop of Winchester became archbishop of Canterbury in this time period, Stigand remains the only prelate who retained Winchester upon his appointment to the metropolitan see. Even Stigand's retention of Winchester may not, at least in the beginning, have been pure ambition to control two extremely wealthy and influential sees. Because of the circumstance surrounding his appointment, his position as archbishop was always questionable. We should at least ponder the idea that because Stigand was a survivor and his initial holding of both Winchester and Canterbury may have been the episcopal form of a safety net. If he relinquished Winchester but was later forcibly removed from his tenuous position at Canterbury he would have been left with nothing.

NON-ENGLISH COMPARISONS

A larger number of bishops' backgrounds appear in European records although like many English prelates some remain only as names in episcopal lists. Also similar to Archbishops Dunstan and Oswald discussed in this chapter there are traceable familial links between uncles and nephews (sometimes great-uncles and great-nephews) and a few instances of brothers holding simultaneous ecclesiastical positions. Unlike, contemporary

¹⁵⁴ Wormald, 'Strange Affair', p. 138.

English bishops some familial links include father-son relationships.¹⁵⁵ Father-son connections do appear among the lower Anglo-Saxon clergy and one bishop not included in my survey, Wulfstan II of Worcester, had a married cleric for a father. Two others apparently had children, as mentioned above, Archbishop Ælfsige seems to have had a son, Godwine of Worthy but there is no indication Godwine ever became a cleric and he died in battle. The second prelate, Bishop Ealdhun of Durham¹⁵⁶ (990x995-1016) may have had a daughter named Ecgfritha who became the first wife of Ealdorman Uhtred of Northumbria.¹⁵⁷ Some have suggested that Dunstan's father was also a cleric of some sort but this is not strongly supported.¹⁵⁸ By the tenth and eleventh century both the English and European episcopates appear composed mainly of celibate senior clergymen. Of the three identified familial links uncle-nephew by far represents the largest number of connections.¹⁵⁹

Unlike the English bishops surveyed in this chapter, their European counter-parts could form ecclesiastical dynasties having a number of uncles and nephews hold the same diocese or a near-by one. In the ninth century Archbishop Hincmar of Rhemis (845-882) had a nephew and namesake who became bishop of neighbouring Laon (858-71). The bishopric of Constance was held by a great-uncle (c.838-871), uncle (875x876-889), and nephew (890-c.919) who all bore the name Salomo. Additionally, the third Salomo had a documented brother Waldo who held the see of Freising (883-906) and a nephew Waldo who held the bishopric of Chur.¹⁶⁰ It appears to have become popular to name sons

¹⁵⁵ Julia Barrow provides a good overview of these three groupings of familial connections in her most recent book. See J. Barrow, *The Clergy in the Medieval World: Secular Clerics, Their Families and Careers in North-Western Europe c. 800-c. 1200* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 115-157.

¹⁵⁶ PASE, Ealdhun 6. He was responsible for moving the bishopric from Chester-le-Street to Durham.

¹⁵⁷ *Symeonis monachi opera omnia*, ed. T. Arnold (London, 1882), pp. 215-17: 'magae strenuitatis juveni et militia aptissimo, filiam suam, nomine Ecgfridam, Aldunus episcopus dederat uxorem'. For Ecgfritha see PASE, Ecgfritha 1.

¹⁵⁸ Barrow, *Clergy*, p. 141.

¹⁵⁹ There may have been a possible connection between Bishop Theodred of London and Elmham (906x926-951x953) and Bishop Theodred of Elmham (fl. 974-995). This suggested kinship is based off the first Theodred's will (*Wills*, no. 1) and his bequeathing of a white chasuble (*wite massehakele*) to another Theodred. This theory identifies the later bishop with the grantee in the will.

¹⁶⁰ H. Maurer, *Das Bistum Konstanz: Die Konstanzer Bischöfe vom Ende des 6. Jahrhunderts bis 1206* (Berlin, 2003), pp. 67-78, 84-119 and K. Schmid, 'Religiöses und sippengebundenes

intended for the Church after clerical uncles as perhaps best demonstrated by the three (related) Adalberos who held the bishopric of Metz throughout the tenth century and two further Adalberos who became archbishop of Rheims and bishop of Verdun during the late 900s.¹⁶¹ The elder relative often took over the education and career promotion of his young kinsman. Again the best comparisons are the Anglo-Saxon 'church families' of Archbishops Dunstan and Oswald but even their kin-groups never achieved the control of a specific episcopal seat for multiple generations that occurred on the continent.

Numerous high-ranking Frankish and German families placed sons in the Church. An interesting pattern emerges within these kin-groups in that one sees little cross-over in the type of clergy they produced. In other words, these families either placed their sons in secular cathedral communities or in monasteries but rarely in both.¹⁶² The existence of older relative in specific communities greatly influenced the placement of children. They could also exert pressure on a young cleric if he wanted to deviate from the path they had planned for him. For example, a ninth-century monk, Rigrannus tried to become a monk rather than follow his uncle Urso as a canon at Le Mans. The young man eventually capitulated to family pressure at Urso's deathbed.¹⁶³ Comparatively, one has to wonder if the career nurturing and direction provided by their respective uncles to Dunstan and Oswald were delivered quite as gently as portrayed in their *vitae*.¹⁶⁴

Finally, many more clearly documented connections existed between high-ranking aristocrats and clergymen. Perhaps two of the most famous cases involve tenth-century prelates. In 925, Count Herbert II of Vermandois contrived to have his five year old son

Gemeinschaftsbewußtsein in frühmittelalterlichen Gedenkhucheinträgen', in *Gebetsgedenken und adliges Selbstverständnis im Mittelalter: Ausgewählte Beiträge*, ed. K. Schmid (Sigmaringen, 1983), pp. 580-84.

¹⁶¹ Barrow, *Clergy*, pp. 123-24 and J. Nightingale, *Monasteries and Patrons in the Gorze Reform:*

Lotharingia C.850-1000 (Oxford, 2001), pp. 72-7. Nightingale also provides a family tree at p. 276.

¹⁶² C. B. Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980-1198* (Ithaca, NY, 1987), pp. 46-51.

¹⁶³ J. Barrow, 'Demonstrative behaviour and political communication in later Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 36 (2007), 127-50, 127, and 160. See also G. Constable, 'Monks and canons in Carolingian Gaul: the case of Rigrannus of Le Mans', in *Afer Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History: Essays presented to Walter Goffart*, ed. A. Murray (Toronto, 1998), pp. 320-36 (pp. 332-35).

¹⁶⁴ See VSD, 7.2-3 and VSO, ii.1-3.

Hugh elected to the archbishopric of Reims.¹⁶⁵ Less extreme Otto I's youngest brother entered the Church at a young age and eventually become Archbishop of Cologne (953-965) as well as Duke of Lotharingia.¹⁶⁶ Constance Brittain Bouchard's work on the bishoprics of Burgundy (Auxerre, Langres, Mâcon, Autun, Chalon, and Nevers) reveal that many of the men who held these sees came during the eleventh century from the high aristocratic families.¹⁶⁷ Studies like Bouchard's also reveal that few of these men ever took monastic vows in the eleventh century.

Thus, the European contemporaries of the Anglo-Saxon bishops surveyed in this chapter did not obtain episcopal preferment because of monastic connections. They do appear to have gained preferment through the help of more senior family members who had entered the Church before them. Frankish and German bishops also possessed many more familial connections among the highest aristocratic kin-groups and succeeded in establishing ecclesiastical dynasties at one or more sees. One final thing that appears among European prelates but I have not been able to find in late Anglo-Saxon bishops is illegitimate aristocratic or royal sons. For example, William archbishop of Mainz (929-968) was the illegitimate son of Otto I and an unknown Slavic woman. The later Archbishop Arnulf of Reims (d. 1021) was the bastard of Lothair IV of France and probably not the only illegitimate son of this king placed in the Church.¹⁶⁸ No extant sources reveal this type of background in any English bishop. This lack of recorded illegitimacy raises some interesting questions about the aristocracy, Anglo-Saxon society, and the Church. Such a background perhaps did not matter to this society at all but the lack of any record for such children stands out in comparison.

¹⁶⁵ Flodoard, *Historia Remensis Ecclesiae* IV.20, 28-9 MGH SS 36:60.

¹⁶⁶ See Rutger, *Vita Brunonis archiepiscopi Coloniensis* ed. Irene Ott MGH SS rer. Ger. 10:1-55.

¹⁶⁷ Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister*, pp. 67-71, charts at pp. 68-69. See also C. B. Bouchard, *Those of My Blood: Creating Noble Families in Medieval Francia* (Philadelphia, 2010), specifically chapter 4.

¹⁶⁸ J. Glenn, *Politics and History in the Tenth Century: The Work and World of Richer of Reims* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 66 and 89.

CONCLUSION

Returning to late Anglo-Saxon episcopal figures, witness lists show that all these prelates spent time at the royal court after their appointments. More interestingly many of these bishops had some sort of connection with the royal court, often through family networks, and several certainly spent time at court before their ecclesiastical appointments. Anglo-Saxon bishops, in general, did not come from the highest ranking families; for those clerics who may have come from the aristocratic elite, the link remains uncertain because of the nature of the source. For the men who started their careers at the royal court, some like Dunstan and Æthelwold, did not begin as clerics. Given what I have traced about their family backgrounds, their decisions to enter the Church, particularly Dunstan, probably reflect a family strategy for the advancement of male children, or perhaps the kin group as a whole. A similar strategy appears among the continental bishops. Even Oswald's decision (a man who came to the court a professed monk) to enter the Church may indicate strong encouragement, if not pressure, from the paternal side of his family, which boasted several high-ranking Churchmen, and not just purely personal inclination.

Bishops' familial networks, especially immediate members, usually remain hard to trace but do reveal some patterns. In general, parents and siblings go unnamed if not unrecorded. Several bishops, however, have documented brothers and sisters. Interestingly, a prelate, not uncommonly, could have a male sibling in the Church as well. Brothers who remained laymen appear rarely in documents and most, while they emerge as well-to-do thegns, generally acted only within their local power base and seem unremarkable in comparison with their ecclesiastical brothers who functioned on a kingdom-wide level. A question arises here that cannot be answered with any certainty but is still worth pondering. All the prelates' documented lay, blood brothers appear as landowners, probably inheriting family lands. The placement of a son in the Church appears to follow a natural process of providing for a child whom the familial inheritance

could not support. Yet the clerics often rose higher than their brothers, putting the prelates on level with ealdormen who very possibly came from socially superior families. Especially for kin-groups that already possessed one or more prominent church officials, the placing of a son in the Church combined with a proper introduction to the court, or at the very least the chance of such an induction, must have been a consideration if not an outright strategy. Indeed even as abbots, the future bishops probably wielded more influence than their lay brothers and provided access for their families to higher circles if not more opportunities for land and wealth and also, for nephews, introductions necessary to begin a career.

Female siblings of Anglo-Saxon bishops also demonstrate two trends; first, every one of these women who appear in the records remained a laywoman and second, none of them have documented names. This second issue exists despite the fact that a few of these women emerge as landowners in their own right. The documented women all appear to have married either because their husbands' names survive, even in documents where theirs do not, or they are mentioned in conjunction with their offspring. This information does not mean that other sisters did not exist nor that some of them did not enter the Church, rather it shows the importance of the men with whom these female siblings formed marriage alliances. That their sisters wed important men, if still only at the local level, indicates that most bishops probably came from an aristocratic (although apparently not the highest-ranking) background. They may not have come from the highest of aristocratic echelons but the prelates' connections to the royal court combined with lay siblings' apparent importance and significant marriages near the familial power base strongly imply that Anglo-Saxon bishops were not climbing the proverbial social ladder from a very low rung.

This apparent upward social movement among abbots and bishops does not necessarily mark a major differentiation between bishops and ealdormen but instead

makes them appear more similar. Rarely did an Anglo-Saxon kin group remain at the top of the secular elite for more than three generations which means the families which did obtain the top positions often existed either in a state of rising or falling. Indeed, looking at certain bishops' families this could also be said. The similarities in the rise of families, whether it is through Church or lay positions will be further explored in subsequent chapters. Bishops and ealdormen appear to have different social backgrounds and they do not come from the same kin groups. Based on several similar actions discussed above that can be compared between the two groups and the tracing of families for more than one generation, the question does arise whether prelates' and high aristocrats' long-term backgrounds are truly that different. The answer to this question may shed more light on the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy as a whole.

The survey of bishops in this chapter for the most part supports Mary Francis Smith's suggestion that monks replaced royal clerics as the pool from which Anglo-Saxon kings chose their bishops. Smith has focused on the reversal of this custom during the reign of Edward the Confessor. While there does appear to be a trend, a comparison of these three dioceses reveals that they do not conform to it in a straight forward manner. All three cathedral communities eventually converted to monasteries and the bishops of these dioceses generally attended court regularly thus indicating involvement with issues on a kingdom-wide level. The archdiocese of Canterbury had a long line of monk-archbishops bookended on the either end by at least one royal priest. Our survey of Worcester also began with the probable royal priest Cenwald. After Cenwald a line of apparent monk-bishops staffed the diocese through the Conquest, the only uncertainty is Wulfstan I. Should we argue that monks received preferment to Worcester since it had converted to a monastic community? The answer is no. The surveys of Canterbury and Winchester, prove that a cathedral community becoming monastic did not necessitate a continual line of monk-bishops and thus indicates that towards the end of the Anglo-

Saxon era the king's decision in episcopal preferment involved more factors than merely whether a man had taken monastic vows or not.

Finally, the line of bishops for Winchester during the period under consideration actually began with the unique figure of Ælfheah the 'Bald' who appears to have been both monk and royal priest. His immediate successors were probably two secular clerics but then a line of monk-bishops starting with Æthelwold. The final two bishops, however, notably break the monk-bishop pattern. The penultimate prelate proves especially interesting; Ælfwine served as a royal priest to Cnut before receiving Winchester from the same king. Cnut tended to follow the pattern set by his predecessors, Edgar and Æthelred who appointed monks to episcopal sees, although it is necessary to consider that Cnut, and even Æthelred's actions, might not have risen strictly from their own choice in all appointments but rather from an enforced system. The activities surrounding Eadsige's appointment to Canterbury reveal Cnut's acquiescence to this pattern. Yet, because of the importance of Winchester to the Anglo-Saxon kings, perhaps Cnut followed a pattern set by even earlier kings. As discussed above, Æthelstan and Eadwig both appear to have appointed clerics they knew, possibly relatives to some degree, which assumedly increased loyalty and thus secured the city of Winchester. The particular care that appears to have gone into many of the Winchester appointments marks this see as a significant post, something that the witness lists confirm. They reveal the bishops of Winchester often attesting at one of the first positions after the archbishops.

A final question to discuss is how clerics, particularly monks, came to the attention of the king. Through their *Lives* scholars can piece together how men like Dunstan, Oswald, and Æthelwold received their episcopal appointments. Yet, many of their immediate successors' appointments remain more difficult to decipher. Several of them held abbacies of important monasteries and thus had probably visited court at some point and gained an introduction to the king but there is no certainty. Still, we know

Oswald at least travelled with a retinue of his own men and servants. If the archbishop of York could afford to travel with his own followers then surely the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of Winchester could as well. Indeed, it may have even been an expectation as a display of the importance of their positions as well as a practicality. It does not seem impossible therefore, especially given the influence Dunstan apparently had in Oswald's appointment, that bishops and even abbots brought their favourite clerics along in their retinues not only as travel companions but also to introduce them at court. Additionally, records reveal various kings occasionally visiting monasteries and abbots may have taken these opportunities to introduce protégés. Perhaps they even tried, or succeeded, in handpicking their own successors. An introduction to the royal court probably did not guarantee an abbacy or bishopric but patronage of a current high-ranking official certainly would have increased a cleric's chance to gain higher preferment. Whether this official was part of a cleric's kin group may not have mattered as much as the link to the court itself.

Chapter 2

Appointment to High Secular Office c. 950-1066

In this year King Cnut succeeded to all the kingdom of England and divided it into four, Wessex for himself, East Anglia for Thorkel, Mercia for Eadric, and Northumbria for Eric.

ASC C s.a. 1017

The annal for the year 1017 provides an account of one of the most famous divisions of England into separate regions: Wessex, East Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria, but the chronicler oversimplified the political partitions of Cnut's new kingdom. The increasing number of Viking raids and two major invasions had led to the death of many Anglo-Saxon ealdormen in the preceding years. The first invasion occurred in 1013-1014 led by Sweyn Forkbeard, King of Denmark, and culminated in the Anglo-Saxon king, Æthelred, fleeing the country and Sweyn claiming the English throne. The Danish invader's reign was short-lived, however, as he died in early 1014 forcing his son, Cnut, to flee England. The leading English magnates recalled Æthelred but Cnut returned to the island again in 1015, and led a second and eventually much more successful invasion. King Æthelred died in 1016 with his son, Edmund Ironside succeeding him. Edmund and Cnut continued to fight for control of England throughout the summer and fall of 1016. At the Battle of *Assandun*, the Danes won a decisive victory in large part because of the betrayal of Edmund by Ealdorman Eadric Streona of Mercia, who withdrew his troops from battle. Eadric had also betrayed King Æthelred the previous year and joined Cnut's side before switching his allegiance back to the English for a brief time in 1016. After the Battle of *Assandun*, Edmund and Cnut negotiated the division of the kingdom between the two of them; the Danish prince received the area north of the Thames and the new English king

the lands south of the river. Edmund Ironside's death less than a month later enabled Cnut to claim the entire English kingdom which he would rule for almost twenty years.¹

The chronicler's description of Cnut's four-way division implied there were only three ealdormen (Eadric, Thorkell and Eric) in England in 1017 but other sources have revealed the existence of several more. Many of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy did die in the years before to Cnut's conquest but at least one ealdorman, Leofwine, appears to have retained his position in the southwest Midlands which places him in Mercia, the area of the kingdom given to Eadric Streona. Another ealdorman may have survived in the east named Godric, who was possibly located in East Anglia. Godric need not necessarily have been an ealdorman, however, and may have only been a high-ranking thegn.² It also remains unclear whether or not Ealdred of the House of Bamburgh had succeeded his father Uhtred immediately upon his death in 1016 as an ealdorman in northern Northumbria. The presence of Ealdred of Bamburgh³ in the north calls into question how much control Eric had over Northumbria.⁴ The division described in the annal for 1017 did not leave unnamed only Anglo-Saxons who may have held a high-ranking lay position at this point. An Eilifr, also known as Eglaf and possibly a Scandinavian, became the earl of Gloucestershire.⁵ When Eilifr received his appointment is uncertain and he probably held his position at the time of Cnut's four-way division as he witnesses multiple charters dated between 1016 and 1024.⁶ By 1020 Cnut had appointed several more earls and

¹ Edmund Ironside had several younger brothers but they were either killed by Cnut's orders or fled the country.

² For a more in-depth discussion of Godric, his possible area of influence, and why he may have only been a leading thegn see S. Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', in *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. A. Rumble (London, 1994), pp. 44-83 (p. 64).

³ PASE, Ealdred 52. Unfortunately, no pre-Conquest source discusses Ealdred and our knowledge about him comes from Simeon of Durham's *De obsequio Dunelmi*. For a discussion of this document and the information it provides on the earls of Bamburgh see W. E. Kapelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North: the Region and its Transformation, 1000-1135* (Chapel Hill, 1979), pp. 19-26.

⁴ I am not discounting the fact that Leofwine and Ealdred may have been considered more as deputies in the new arrangement but there is no concrete proof that they were either.

⁵ Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', 46. Eilifr is believed to be the brother of Ulfr, a Scandinavian magnate who married Cnut's sister Estrith.

⁶ PASE, Eglaf 6. His name appears in the witness lists of fifteen extant charters not all of which are authentic. See S951, S953, S954, S955, S956, S958, S959, S960, S961, S977, S980, S981, S984, and S1424.

executed Eadric Streona. The beginning of the annal for 1017, like the Domesday Book, provides a snapshot of what England looked like at a specific moment. While simplified, this four-way division proves useful in facilitating a discussion about Anglo-Saxon England and the ealdormen and earls who acted as the king's officials within these four regions.

This chapter explores the identity of those appointed to the highest secular offices and how they gained this preferment in three regions: Mercia, East Anglia, and Wessex. The lack of documentation for the northern earldom(s) during 950-1066 severely limits a proper analysis of Northumbria but this area will be mentioned when possible. We will examine two central questions. First, the system of appointment to high-ranking lay offices, in other words, how these particular men came to the attention of the king. They appear to fall into two main categories, although the lines between these two groups easily become blurred: those appointed on merit and those who owed their position to lineage. The second question involves location. Not only the site of a specific earldom, when possible, but also the setting of the particular earl's power base and whether or not these two important locations correspond to each other. For example, East Anglia often bore the brunt of Viking invasions and thus served as a key defensive position but the ealdormen and earls who administrated it rarely possessed familial lands within the greater Anglian area. Of those men who held the title ealdorman or earl of East Anglia between 950 and 1066, Æthelstan 'Half-king', and Harold and Gryth Godwineson were West Saxons, while Ælfgar originated in Mercia, and Thorkell started his career in England as a paid Scandinavian mercenary.⁷

⁷ Æthelstan's sons Æthelwold (956-962) and Æthelwine (962-992) succeeded their father as ealdormen of East Anglia and thus their familial lands lay in Wessex. Æthelstan held the ealdordom for over twenty years, however, and became the most prominent of the king's lay officials. Thus, I do not consider Æthelwold and Æthelwine in the same light as the other men who held East Anglia between 950-1066. They would have had an established power base, thanks to their father's position, from which to administer the area.

This chapter will appear to focus on the great aristocratic families of the late Anglo-Saxon era and to a certain extent it does because they dominated the ealdordoms and earldoms of several kings' reigns. The surviving sources also tend to bring these particular men into sharper focus. However, this in this chapter I hope to shed light on the aristocracy as a whole and how the location and actions of both 'old' families and 'new' men reflect on each other, their entire social class and their relationship with the king. By using this approach, this chapter acts as the necessary counterpart to the overall discussion of high-ranking royal agents and explores how laymen obtained high secular appointments from the king. Furthermore, it produces an examination of familial ties among high-ranking Anglo-Saxons and allows us to compare them to their episcopal contemporaries. This method also shows how these relationships affected ealdormen's actions, particularly during times of unrest, towards other families, the king, and even their own kinsmen. Finally, it demonstrates the instability of being at the top of the late Anglo-Saxon secular society. The 'newness' of an ealdorman or earl was relative; the greatest Anglo-Saxon aristocratic families did not last beyond four generations in the top lay positions and indeed most did not survive past three. Yet this very fluidity among the highest lay families indicates something about the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy as a whole shedding light on the top layers of this society and their interactions with each other.

LOCATION

The comparison of the location of an ealdordom to the majority of its administrators' original patrimonies reveals some interesting patterns. To provide a framework for this discussion, we will return to Cnut's four-way division of England and examine things in terms of East Anglia, Northumbria, Wessex and Mercia. Exceptions exist but in general these four areas reveal two categories: ealdordoms with transplanted administrators and those with native administrators.

As mentioned above, East Anglia served as a primary defensive area. It also possessed a large Danish population and one of the wealthiest regions in the kingdom. Yet of those men who held the title ealdorman or earl of East Anglia in late Anglo-Saxon period, Æthelstan ‘Half-king’ (932-956) and his family originated in Wessex, so did Harold Godwineson (1045-1053) and his brother Gyrth (1057x1059-1066) while Ælfgar (1051, 1053-1055) came from the earl of Mercia’s family, and Thorkell (1017-1021) was a Scandinavian.⁸ Æthelstan’s sons, Æthelwold (956-962) and Æthelwine (962-992), succeeded their father as ealdormen of East Anglia and thus their original patrimony lay in Wessex. Æthelstan was ealdorman for over twenty years, however, and became the most prominent of the king’s lay officials. Thus, I do not consider Æthelwold and Æthelwine in the same light as the other men who held East Anglia between 950-1066. They would have had an established power base, thanks to their father, within the region from which to administer it. The seemingly conscious placement of non-native East Anglian men in this ealdordom mirrors the same care kings appear to take in placing Southumbrian clerics in the archbishopric of York. Placing non-native officials, whether secular or episcopal, enabled the late Anglo-Saxon kings to attempt to keep these more ‘Danish’ areas linked with the royal court in the south. This practice did not always work as Archbishop Wulfstan I of York (931-956) who sided with his rebellious northern flock against King Eadred.

Marriages may have been particularly important with relocated officials. Undoubtedly the king provided a certain amount, of lands, probably originally from the royal fisc, in order to provide a powerbase for a transplanted nobleman. Yet, a man in a new region of the kingdom certainly had to consider whether to marry a woman who could provide connections on the national level in order to remain an active participant at

⁸ There were long periods with no named ealdorman or earl of East Anglia. It is believed, however, that the area was still administered at this time. Ulfcetel ‘Snilling’ appears to have overseen the area c. 1004 to his death at the Battle of *Assadun* in 1016. After Thorkell’s exile in 1021, the earldom was again left vacant but Osgot Clapa the Staller may have administrated it c.1026-1044x1045. See *PASE*, Thorkell 1.

that stage of society. Or he could marry the daughter of a local family who might not provide kingdom-spanning links but would secure a base in the official's new area that a royal appointment and gift of multiple estates could not.⁹ If particularly lucky an ealdorman or earl would find a woman who had both high status and good local connections. The most obvious examples of course being Ælfric *cild*, Byrhtnoth, and Siward, all of whom married local women who came from an ealdormen's family.¹⁰ These officials could build up local connections over time but marriage remained the fastest way to gain a support network in a new location.

Northumbria has a somewhat mixed history, members of the House of Bamburgh appear throughout the period under consideration as ealdormen and earls including Oswulf (946-950x966, dux or high-reeve), Eadwulf (fl. 968-970), Waltheof (975x994-1006), Uhtred (fl. 1009-1016), Ealdred (d. 1038), and Eadulf (d. 1041).¹¹ At least three English ealdormen, however, had no traceable relationship with Bamburgh. These are Oslac (966-975), Thored (975x979-992x993), and Ælfhelm (c. 994-1006);¹² although these three seem to only have control of southern Northumbria leaving the area north of the Tees, where Bamburgh was located, in the control of that house. Therefore it is more proper to speak of two earldoms from 966-1006 in this region. After 1006 Uhtred seems to have administered the entire region until his death. The Eric (1016-1023x1033)

⁹ A. Wareham, *Lords and Communities in Early Medieval East Anglia* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 18-23. Wareham provides a good discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of both kinds of marriage.

¹⁰ Siward married into the House of Bamburgh. Byrhtnoth and Ælfric *cild* both married the daughters of powerful local ealdormen's families before their appointments and their marriages may have aided in their elevation to high office. Ælfric himself was probably Mercian like his wife but their marital union probably paved the way for his appointment as successor to his brother-in-law.

¹¹ PASE, Oswulf 17, Eadwulf 43, Waltheof 4 and Waltheof 6, Uhtred 10 and Uchtred 2, Ealdred 52, and Eadwulf 44. Waltheof was probably the son of Oswulf the High-reeve and while he only appears in the sources starting in 994 he may well have been in control of the area north of the Tees from the mid-970s. See D. W. Rollason, *Northumbria, 500-1100: Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 267. Uhtred 10 is listed as 'Ealdorman of the Northumbrians' and Uchtred 2 as 'Earl of Bamburgh' but they are the same person. Uhtred is noteworthy for several reasons, not the least of which for his three marriages. According to Symeon of Durham, his first wife was the daughter of the bishop of Chester-le-Street and Durham. He set her aside to wed the daughter of a Yorkshire family and eventually went on to marry one of King Æthelred's daughters.

¹² PASE, Oslac 7, Thored 6 and Thored 7, and Ælfhelm 17. Ælfhelm's family came from the northern Midlands. His brother was the thegn Wulfric Spot and his daughter Ælfgifu of Northampton, either became Cnut's first wife or his concubine. She bore Cnut's sons Sweyn and Harold Harefoot. Ælfhelm himself was killed with the king's knowledge and his two sons were blinded in 1006.

mentioned in the annal for the year 1017 received the southern area and after him, another Scandinavian, Siward (1023x1033-1055) became earl of Northumbria.¹³ North of the Tees at least appears to have remained in the hands of the house of Bamburgh under Uhtred's sons, Ealdred and Eadwulf both of whom were murdered in 1038 and 1041 respectively. Eadwulf apparently died at the hands of his southern Northumbrian counterpart Siward who coincidentally had married Eadwulf's niece, Ælfflæd.¹⁴ After Siward, Edward the Confessor appointed Tostig Godwineson (1055-1065) from Wessex and then Morcar (1065-c. 1071) who originated in Mercia. Thus, in Northumbria an entrenched native house had to share land with various relocated ealdormen and earls. There is good reason to believe that those from the House of Bamburgh were not appointed to their positions by the Anglo-Saxon kings, unless it involved the area south of the Tees.¹⁵ Lack of direct contact with the king and less dependency on him for a high-level position may explain why this family, unlike the other five families discussed in this chapter, managed to survive and thrive in positions of power for more than four generations.

A pattern starts to emerge if we compare the royally controlled appointments to East Anglia and Northumbria. When the king appointed non-native officials (who have traceable early careers) they invariably came from either Wessex or Mercia. The greatest example of course being the family of the 'Half-King' who appear to have completely transplanted themselves from western Wessex to East Anglia. No relocated ealdormen or earls ever appear to have been transplanted from East Anglia to Northumbria or vice versa. Given that the powerbase of the West Saxon kings was in Wessex and Mercia and that these regions were geographically closer to the kings as well. Within these regions we also find those aristocrats who claim blood ties with the royal family and their patrimonies.

¹³ *PASE*, Eric 2 and Siward 11. Eric may have been Norwegian.

¹⁴ *PASE*, Ælfflæd 24.

¹⁵ Rollason, *Northumbria*, p. 269.

Most traceable Mercian and West Saxon ealdormen between 950-1066 were native aristocrats and the few non-natives either came from West Saxon or Mercian families. The exception to this is the first part of Cnut's reign when the new king appointed several Scandinavian earls, particularly along the Welsh border. The families of Æthelstan 'Half-King' and Ælfhere dominated the Mercian and West Saxon areas during the tenth century which was probably one reason these two kin-groups often stood at odds with one another. In the eleventh century, these two regions endured a similar struggle between Earls Godwine and Leofric and their sons and grandsons. A major difference involves the number of appointments to both areas, a number that decreased in the eleventh century—minus Cnut's initial Scandinavian earls. The number of men not related to the major families of the reign is what actually decreased, eventually leaving only the families of Godwine and Leofric at the end of the Anglo-Saxon period.

We can make several general observations here. First, in the period under consideration it remained unusual for the king not to station an ealdorman in central Wessex. Scholars are generally able to place an official in this area for the entire period. The late Anglo-Saxon kings appear much more likely to leave the eastern and western edges of the kingdom vacant for periods of time. Second, until the Godwinesons, members of the same family do not appear to have held the ealdordom of central Wessex indicating the importance of this area to the West Saxon kings as their own powerbase. The kings also appear to have placed men they particularly trusted in this central area if Ælfheah's (959-972) appointment after his service as a court official and Ælfric's (994-1016) hardy survival of Æthelred's reign give any indication.

The aristocracies in Wessex and Mercia were the biggest supporters of the West Saxon dynasty. Their loyalty a commodity these kings needed to protect; the rulers obviously rewarded their continued support with high secular office, whether it was in their native shires or across the kingdom depended upon the king and sometimes on

which ealdordom became vacant at the time. The geographical closeness cannot be dismissed as well since the administrators of Mercia and Wessex obviously did not have to travel as far to reach the royal court, which made their attendance more likely, as is revealed in their frequent appearance in the royal charters.

SYSTEM OF APPOINTMENTS

As with bishops, ealdormen and earls received their appointments from the king. Unfortunately, unlike their ecclesiastical counterparts, successive lay officials did not always hold the exact same administrative area. This lack of permanent locations makes the tracing and counting of lay magnates more challenging. The boundaries of lay administrative regions could shrink or grow over the course of a king's reign and, as demonstrated by Edward the Confessor, an earl could be removed from one earldom and placed in an entirely new one on the other side of the kingdom. If an ealdorman or earl had a son, no guarantee existed that the son would inherit his father's office. The king could appoint an ealdorman's son to the same title and duties as his father or an entirely different administrative area. To examine the system of appointments to lay office used by the late Anglo-Saxon kings let us begin with a discussion of the system itself, starting with a definition of the two main categories that seemed to motivate these appointments: lineage and merit.

Because of the lack of defined and concrete administrative areas I have divided the examination of various locations by the individual reigns of the last Anglo-Saxon kings beginning in 946 with Eadred. This approach not only keeps this chapter from turning into a series of separate regional studies but maintains the focus on the aristocracy as a whole rather than on any dominant families. Important work has been done both on regions and specific families in the late Anglo-Saxon period but an overarching method here will allow for not only the study of the aristocracy as a whole but also for

comparisons between the principal figures (and their families) between the tenth and eleventh centuries.¹⁶

Like the majority of clerics who achieved high episcopal office, many men who eventually became ealdormen and earls had experienced some sort of introduction to the royal court and thus attracted the attention of the king before they gained preferment. Studies of individuals and families have shown that often sons or younger brothers of current lay officials would start attesting royal charters among the thegns.¹⁷ Depending upon the popularity of their name, some men cannot confidently be identified unless they witness alongside their family members. For example, ealdorman Ælfhere's older brother Ælfheah can only be positively identified after Ælfhere himself started witnessing charters in 955, because several attesting thegns active at this time bore the name Ælfheah.¹⁸ Anglo-Saxon witness lists frequently group members of a family together, either following each other in the list or only being separated by a few names, all of which can aid in identification.¹⁹ This tendency also raises the possibility that they acted together more or less as a family unit. The idea is worth pondering since even during times of conflict, such as when the kingdom was split in 957-959 between the royal brothers Eadwig and Edgar and family members of ealdormen may have found themselves at opposing royal courts, no document gives any indication of sibling

¹⁶ For specific aristocratic families see S. Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007); E. Mason, *The House of Godwine: The History of a Dynasty* (London, 2004); Wareham, *Lords and Communities*; C. Hart, 'Aethelstan 'Half-King' and his Family', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 2 (1973), 115-44; A. Williams, 'Principes Merciorum gentis: the Family, Career and Connections of Ælfhere, Ealdorman of Mercia, 956-83', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 10 (1982), 143-72; and A. Williams, 'The King's Nephew: the Family and Career of Ralph, Earl of Hereford', in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, C. J. Holdsworth, and J. L. Nelson (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1989), pp. 327-43. For work on the aristocracy as a whole see R. Fleming, *Kings and Lords in Conquest England* (Cambridge, 1991); P. A. Clarke, *The English Nobility under Edward the Confessor* (Oxford, 1994); N. Banton, 'Ealdormen and Earls in England from the reign of King Alfred to the reign of King Aethelred II', (D Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1981); R. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1988); and A. Williams, *The World before Domesday: the English Aristocracy 900-1066* (London, 2008).

¹⁷ Hart, 'Half-King', 131-33 and Williams, 'Principes Merciorum gentis', 147-49.

¹⁸ See Williams, 'Principes Merciorum gentis', 147. In contrast, Ordgar, father to Queen Ælfthryth and eventual ealdorman, bore a much more uncommon name.

¹⁹ Both Ann Williams and Stephen Baxter demonstrate how this Anglo-Saxon practice in the witness lists may aid in identifying family members in their works on the kin-groups of the Mercian ealdormen Ælfhere (956-983) and Leofwine (994-1023). See Williams, 'Principes Merciorum gentis', 147-55 and S. Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007), 28-34.

disloyalty. Indeed, only the Godwine family has recorded instances of one or more members not supporting a third.²⁰ This familial loyalty among the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy did not of course extend beyond kin and close friends and most ealdormen appear to only too willing to take advantage when an opponent made a mistake which stunted or even destroyed their political career.

Although the local power base of specific men in certain areas may have forced the king's hand, gaining royal attention remained a vital aspect of advancement.²¹ High-ranking officials, both lay and ecclesiastical, always travelled with retinues. As the *vita* of Archbishop Oswald tells us: 'Dunstan, foremost of the bishops, came with his attendants, as did the holy bishop Æthelwold, and all the aristocracy of all England.'²² Undoubtedly, as their sons or brothers became old enough, current ealdormen and earls would bring them along, both to important local shire meetings and to the royal court. The charter witness lists confirm this fact. Still, familial links cannot explain all appointments; some men must have come to the attention of the king through other means. First, however, familial links or lineage will be analysed especially those who survived past one generation at the top of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy.

Five major families dominate this discussion: three which came to prominence in the tenth century and the two that arose during Cnut's reign and went on to control every earldom in the last years of the Anglo-Saxon period. My purpose here is to determine the major similarities and differences between these families by comparing them side by side, rather than focusing on one or two, and determining what this might indicate concerning the overall system of appointments. These families, generally known by the name of their most prominent member, include the tenth-century families of Æthelstan 'Half-King',

²⁰ These incidents include Harold and Beorn refusing to support Swegn (brother and first cousin respectively) upon his attempted return from exile in 1049 and Harold's lack of backing for his brother Tostig when the younger Godwineson had been rebelled against by the people of his Northumbrian earldom.

²¹ For example, Eadric Streona's hold on certain areas of Mercia may have forced Cnut to retain him as a royal official in the initial months of his reign—since it certainly did not stop Cnut from executing Eadric later in 1017. See Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', p. 81.

²² VSO, iii.9.

Ælfhere, and Æthelweard the Chronicler and the better-known eleventh-century kin groups, the Godwinesons and the family of Leofwine of Mercia. Let us begin first with a brief overview of each of the families.

The Family of Æthelstan ‘Half-King’

According to the *Life* of St Oswald, during the funeral of Ealdorman Æthelmund in 965 Æthelwine,²³ ealdorman of East Anglia, approached Bishop Oswald ‘seeking the favour of his blessing. . . When the blessing had been given, they spoke peaceably with each other. . . They said a good many thing to each other concerning the salvation of their souls.’²⁴ According to both the *Vita Oswaldi* and the twelfth-century *Book of Benefactors* of Ramsey abbey it was during this discussion that Æthelwine offered land in his ealdordom to the future saint to found a monastery. This site would become Ramsey abbey, the first of the great Fenland monasteries.

Ealdorman Æthelwine not only co-founded Ramsey, he and his influential family also donated multiple estates to this monastery as well as other reformed abbeys. After King Edgar’s death, Æthelwine and his brother, a powerful thegn named, Ælfwold,²⁵ acted as protectors of the reformed foundations against the ‘anti-monastic’ reaction.²⁶ Æthelwine proved so supportive of the movement that he earned the nickname *Dei amicus* or ‘friend of God’.²⁷ But, both his generosity towards the Church and his influence among the lay elite need to be read in light of his wider family background.

Æthelwine belonged to a powerful family who were documented supporters of the Church even before the tenth-century reform. Besides his patronage of monasteries,

²³ *PASE*, Æthelwine 2. For a family tree see Figure 5 above.

²⁴ *VSO*, iii.14: ‘petens eius benedictionis gratiam. . . Qui, accepta benedictione, pacifice locuti sunt invicem. . . Plurima inter se locuti sunt de salute animarum.’ See *Chron. Rames.*, I.2.

²⁵ *PASE*, Ælfwold 42.

²⁶ P. Stafford, ‘The reign of Æthelred II, a Study in the Limitations on Royal Policy and Action’, *British Archaeological Reports, British Series*, 59 (1978), 15-46 (p. 23). Stafford discusses how the ‘anti-monastic’ reaction has been misnamed and many of the men who reclaimed lands from certain monasteries were actually major patrons and protectors of other reformed foundations.

²⁷ JW s.a. 991. There are no contemporary documents that call Æthelwine *dei amicus* but C.R. Hart has suggested that it is very unlikely that John of Worcester created this nickname but rather is probably a translation or mistranslation of a vernacular by-name. See Hart, ‘Half-King’, 138.

Æthelwine held the ealdordom of East Anglia from 962 to his death in 992. The surviving charter witness lists demonstrate his immense influence at court. By 970 Æthelwine started attesting in second place among the ealdormen and from 983 until his death he was the most senior ealdorman.²⁸ Between 985 and 990 he may also have administered a large portion of Mercia after the exile of Ælfric *cild*.²⁹ Æthelwine was actually the third member of his family to hold the East Anglian ealdordom.

Æthelstan,³⁰ Æthelwine's father was the first member who obtained the ealdordom of East Anglia. Of this prestigious family he held the most political influence and seemingly rightly earned the nickname we know him by today: Æthelstan 'Half-King'.³¹ Æthelstan's father, a West Saxon noble named Æthelfrith, held an ealdordom in south-east Mercia.³² The 'Half King' obtained ealdorman status in 932 joining his older brother Ælfstan,³³ among the highest lay officials. According to Ramsey's *Book of Benefactors*, the kin-group had familial connections to the West Saxon royal line.³⁴ This possible kinship may have influenced King Æthelstan (924-939) who restructured the royal court at the beginning of his reign. He particularly focused on the West Saxon nobility, where this family originated, and where the strongest opposition to his early rule lay.³⁵ Because of the dynastic struggle at the start of his reign and the later plots against him as well, King Æthelstan most likely sought to appoint loyal men to high-ranking

²⁸ Keynes, *Atlas*, Tables LVI, LVIII, and LXII.

²⁹ Hart, 'Half-King', 134.

³⁰ *PASE*, Æthelstan 26.

³¹ The name comes down to us from Byrhtferth of Ramsey the author of the *Vita sancti Oswaldi*. See *VSO*, iii.14.

³² *PASE*, Æthelfrith 1. Æthelfrith first appeared in 883 and administered an ealdordom in south-eastern Mercia. C.R. Hart has suggested Æthelfrith may eventually have become the chief ealdorman under Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians. Despite his placement in Mercia, Æthelfrith's patrimony may have lain in western Wessex because of the extensive lands he appears to have owned in Devon and Somerset. See Hart, 'Half-King', 116-8.

³³ *PASE*, Ælfstan 27. It should be noted that *PASE* lists him correctly as the brother of Æthelstan 26 'Half-King' but incorrectly as the nephew of Æthelwald 42. Æthelwald 42 is the brother of Ælfstan 27 as well as Æthelstan 26 and Eadric 14. Ælfstan 27 did have a nephew named Æthelwald but he is listed under Æthelwald 41 in the database.

³⁴ *Chron. Rames.*, I.4.

³⁵ S. Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven, 2011), pp. 17-18.

positions, both lay and ecclesiastical.³⁶ Bonds of kinship combined with promotion to such prominent positions surely acted a form of security to a king with several younger half-brothers.

Ealdorman Æthelstan became quite prominent at court, rising through the ranks to attest first among ealdormen in 943 and remaining there until his retirement in 956.³⁷ He appears to have wielded a fair amount of influential even early in his career and may have persuaded King Edmund (939-946) to appointment Æthelstan's younger brothers, Æthelwald I and Eadric,³⁸ as ealdormen during the first years of his reign. Ælfstan can take no credit for the younger siblings appoints as he had died six years before Æthelwald I's appointment in 940.³⁹ Thus, for four years, 942-946, the younger three brothers administered over half of Edmund's kingdom, controlling the ealdordoms of East Anglia, Kent (Æthelwald I), and central Wessex (Eadric).⁴⁰ Unlike, the similar situation found in Edward the Confessor's reign with Harold Godwineson and his brothers, King Edmund appears to have been relaxed over the amount of power he placed in the hands of one family.

We find demonstrations of Æthelstan's political influence and power in the kingdom outside of his place in charter witness lists. Between 949 and 955, he may have held administrative responsibility over large areas in south-eastern and central Mercia.⁴¹ This is mostly speculative, however, based on the lack of any known ealdormen administering these areas during this time. Therefore after all his brothers' deaths, the

³⁶ As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis King Æthelstan appointed an apparent maternal kinsman, Ælfheah, to the important see of Winchester in 934 or 935.

³⁷ He attested third or fourth among the ealdormen until 942 when he moves in the second place and eventually topped the list in 943. While they were alive, his brothers, first Æthelwald than Eadric, followed him in the lists in the second spot. See Keynes, *Atlas*, Tables XXXVIII, XLII, XLV, XLVIIa, XLVIIb and L.

³⁸ *PASE*, Æthelwald 42 and Eadric. For some confusion in the *PASE* database between Æthelwald 41 and Æthelwald 42 see n33 above.

³⁹ He last attested a charter S 407 which is dated 7 June 934. Hart has suggested that Ælfstan and several other ealdormen who cease attesting after S 407 probably died in the Scottish campaign that summer. See Hart, 'Half-King', 118.

⁴⁰ Hart, 'Half-King', 123. Æthelwald I's ealdordom appears to have included not only Kent but also Surrey, Sussex, and possibly Berkshire.

⁴¹ *ODNB*, 'Æthelstan', C.R. Hart [accessed 17 June 2012].

amount of lands he controlled possibly increased indicating that the title ‘Half-King’ was not inaccurate. In addition, this particular ealdorman also fostered the young ætheling Edgar in his home.⁴² Therefore Ealdorman Æthelwine and his three older brothers grew up with the future king. C. R. Hart has even suggested that it was the personal interest in and direct patronage of monasteries by Æthelstan ‘Half King’ that inspired Edgar’s devotion to the promotion of the reformed Church.⁴³ Surviving charters show that Æthelstan and his brothers donated estates to both Glastonbury and Abingdon.⁴⁴ Æthelstan ‘Half King’ held Glastonbury in such high regard that he eventually retired to this monastery sometime in 956 and disappeared at that point from the surviving records.

The year before Æthelstan’s retirement, Eadwig succeeded to the English throne. During his first year the new king started reorganizing his royal agents by appointing new men as ealdormen and exiling several churchmen. This restructuring may have undermined the power of Æthelstan ‘Half-King’ at court and contributed to his retirement to Glastonbury. Eventually the northern ealdormen rebelled against Eadwig and declared Edgar, King of the Mercia in 957. The English kingdom remained split until Eadwig’s death in 959.

Eadwig may have weakened the power of the ‘Half-King’, but the ealdorman appears to have tried to stem this by bringing his eldest son Æthelwold II to court.⁴⁵ Æthelwold II started attesting among the ealdormen in 956 before his father’s retirement.⁴⁶ Æthelstan’s withdrawal to Glastonbury perhaps shows a rapid decline in his

⁴² Hart, ‘Half-King’, 124. It was probably a combination of both Æthelstan’s power as well as his and his wife’s royal connections, but the decision to entrust a royal son into their care must have been a sign of kingly favour and personal influence.

⁴³ Hart, ‘Half-King’, 124. See Wareham, *Lords and Communities*, p. 18, for discussion of Ælfwyn’s possible royal connections and how this may also have influenced the choice to place Edgar in the house of Æthelstan ‘Half-King’

⁴⁴ For example see *Chronicon monasterii de Abingdon*, (London, 1858), I.41 and H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of Wessex* (Leicester, 1964), p. 257.

⁴⁵ *PASE*, Æthelwold 41.

⁴⁶ See Hart, ‘Half-King’, 127-8, for discussion of the charter evidence see p27, n3. Hart further suggests that Æthelwold II may have acted as an under-ealdorman to his father in early 956 overseeing Essex. If Æthelstan’s oldest son was the short-lived ealdorman of Essex, this would explain the brief break between the end of Ealdorman Byrhtferth’s attestations and the appearance of Byrhtnoth among ealdormen in the witness lists.

power and influence with the new king. However, the immediate appointment of Æthelwold II as his father's replacement in East Anglia indicates that the family remained very powerful and Æthelstan's retirement may also be read as a sign of confidence that his sons were able to maintain their high station without him.

It could not have been a surprise when Æthelwold II supported Edgar's party given his father's loss of influence at Eadwig's court. It also appears either Edgar or Æthelwold brought the ealdormen's three younger brothers to the Mercian court. All four brothers attest Edgar's first charter as king of Mercia.⁴⁷

Once the kingdom was reunited under Edgar, his favour towards his foster brothers, particularly the younger two, continued. Æthelwold II's death in 962 left the East Anglian ealdordom vacant and Edgar immediately appointed Æthelwine, the youngest and closest to the king in age, in his place. The middle brothers, Ælfwold and Æthelsige, never obtained ealdorman appointments but this lack of such a title proved irrelevant.⁴⁸ Byrhtferth of Ramsey wrote that 'Ælfwold. . . was exalted with such authority, that he disdained to become an ealdorman'.⁴⁹ Byrhtferth continues describing Æthelsige as 'a very powerful man, such that he acquired the authority of an ealdorman and had the distinction of exceeding importance whenever he came into the king's presence'.⁵⁰ The surviving documents prove these statements were not just phrases by a Ramsey monk in honour of his co-founder's family. Ælfwold (d. 990) appears as an important thegn and attested royal charters throughout most of Edgar's reign.⁵¹ Based on his frequent charter attestations, the second youngest brother, Æthelsige also regularly attended Edgar's court.⁵² He apparently became King Edgar's *camerarius* or chamberlain

⁴⁷ See S 579.

⁴⁸ *PASE*, Ælfwold 42 and Æthelsige 44.

⁴⁹ *VSO*, iii.14: 'Ælfuold. . . tante potestatis auctoritate erat sublimatus, ut dux fieri dedignaretur'.

⁵⁰ *VSO*, iii.14: 'virtutis erat vir, ita ut ducis possideret auctoritatem et honorem haberet potestatis eximie cum ad regis presentiam veniret'.

⁵¹ See Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LVII. He attests from 958 to 972. Ælfwold survived past 972 and is known for his defence of reformed monasteries after King Edgar's death.

⁵² See Keynes, *Atlas*, Table VII. He usually attested in a more senior position among the thegns than Ælfwold and Æthelwine until the former's appointment to the East Anglian ealdordom.

although he appears to have resigned the position in or soon after 963 and from then on only infrequently attests royal charters until 968.⁵³ Thereafter he helped Æthelwine in the administration of East Anglia until his death in 987.⁵⁴ Despite his favour towards them, Edgar did not raise all four brothers to ealdorman status, showing, unlike his father Edmund, an uneasiness with that much power in the hands of one family.

Therefore, over three generations between Æthelfrith and his grandson Æthelwine, seven men from this family served as ealdormen. Three administered the ealdordom of East Anglia, two held office in Mercia, one in Wessex and the final oversaw Kent and the surrounding counties. Another member acted as the royal chamberlain for several years during King Edgar's reign. A final son of this kindred never rose above the level of thegn, but attended Edgar's court so frequently that he must have acted on the 'national' level. The sons of Æthelstan 'Half-King' became politically powerful in their own right but his grandsons did not gain such prominence and for the most part seem unexceptional.⁵⁵ Æthelwine's three sons, Æthelweard, Eadwine, and Leofwine, never rose above the level of thegn and mostly appear active only in the East Anglian area, although the *Chronicle* records one, Æthelweard, as dying at the Battle of Assandun in 1016.⁵⁶ No surviving record reports Æthelsige ever having either a wife or children but that of course does not mean he had none and it may be that no children lived into adulthood. Finally, Ælfwold and his wife Ælfhild produced an unnamed daughter whose own son Eadnoth may have become a novice at Ramsey.⁵⁷ Therefore, with the

⁵³ Hart, 'Half-King', 132. See Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LVII. He was usually in the company of his brother Ælfwold.

⁵⁴ Hart, 'Half-King', 131.

⁵⁵ Hart, 'Half-King', 130. Æthelwold II's marriage may have produced a son, Leofric, but if so, he appears unremarkable. Hart has suggested that Æthelwold's son was the Leofric who with his wife Leoflæd founded of St Neot's Priory in Huntingdonshire between 979 and 984.

⁵⁶ *ODNB*, 'Æthelwine', C.R. Hart [accessed 17 June 2012].

⁵⁷ See *Chron. Rames.*, II.35. This chapter records the will of Ælfhild, wife of Ælfwold. She leaves an estate to her grandson Eadnoth ('filio filiae meae'), provided the Ramsey community accept him as a monk. The Ramsey chronicler reports that Eadnoth had been a steward of an estate at Slepe but had been struck down by an illness after he mocked the remains of St Ivo. He goes on to write that Eadnoth suffered from this illness until his death so that his soul could be found worthy of salvation but no mention is made of whether Eadnoth ever actually became a monk.

death of Æthelwine, this powerful family appears to have ceased acting at the national level with any notable political success.

The Family of Ælfhere

This particular kin group remains the most obscure of the ‘great’ families. Yet, as Ann Williams and Barbara Yorke have demonstrated, Ælfhere’s family and their rivalry with Æthelstan ‘Half-King’ and his kin prove essential in understanding the reigns of Edgar and Æthelred.⁵⁸

The family first made its appearance among the lay elite in 940 when Ealhhelm started witnessing among the ealdormen. Appointed by King Edmund, Ealhhelm appears to have administered a region in Mercia centred on Worcestershire; he last attested in 951.⁵⁹ His oldest son Ælfheah attested amongst the thegns and probably witnessed several charters for Eadred although, as discussed above, he cannot be confidently identified until 955 when Ealhhelm’s second son Ælfhere also joins the witness lists.⁶⁰ Ælfheah appears to have become a royal seneschal (*disc-thegn*) and may have used his position as royal household official under the new king, Eadwig, to obtain their father’s Mercian ealdordom for Ælfhere in 956. Ælfheah himself became ealdorman of Hampshire in 959, an office he held until 972.

This generation had two other recorded brothers, Eadric, an obscure figure, and Ælfwine, who like Ælfheah, bore a very popular name.⁶¹ Ann Williams has suggested that Ælfwine was probably the man who attested high among the thegns starting with charters from Edgar’s time as king of the Mercians and equally possible the heir to a certain Wulfric with reversion to Glastonbury.⁶² This Wulfric may have been Archbishop

⁵⁸ Williams, ‘Principes Merciorum gentis’, p. 144 and B. Yorke, ‘Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century’, in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. B. Yorke (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1988), pp. 89-118 (pp. 75-78).

⁵⁹ Williams, ‘Principes Merciorum gentis’, p. 144. See family tree, Figure 6 above.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147. Ælfheah is considered the oldest son because he was married by 940.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 155.

Dunstan's brother. Dunstan's family appears to have had a special relationship with this specific monastery and the archbishop was abbot there for a time. Ælfwine fulfilled Wulfric's will by retiring to that specific monastic house around 971 and donating the lands to it.⁶³

Much can be gleaned about this family because the apparent eldest, Ælfheah, left a will.⁶⁴ Yet the second son Ælfhere became the most prominent family member. Appointed to his father's ealdordom by Eadwig, Ælfhere chose to side with Edgar when the kingdom split in 957. His loyalty apparently earned him supremacy at Edgar's Mercian court and by the 960s the other Mercian ealdormen appear to have been made subordinate to him.⁶⁵ As the other Mercian officials died, it seems Ælfhere took direct control over their administrative areas. His responsibilities may have extended even further when Ælfheah died in 972, since Ælfhere may have administered his late brother's ealdordom for five years until another ealdorman received the area in 977.⁶⁶ This rise in power obviously put Ælfhere and his family into a direct rivalry with the house of Æthelstan 'Half-King', which lost influence as the newer family gained it. Still, Æthelwine, Æthelstan's son, survived Ælfhere by nearly ten years. The final members of this kin group include Ælfric *cild*, his son Ælfwine, and, according to Ælfheah's will, his sons Ælfweard and Godwine. Ælfric was Ælfhere's brother-in-law and his successor to the Mercian ealdordom but King Æthelred exiled him in 985. Ælfhere had no recorded wife or children. Ælfric's son, Ælfwine, died in 991 at Maldon.⁶⁷ Concerning Ælfheah's

⁶³ Williams, 'Princeps Merciorum gentis', p. 155.

⁶⁴ See S 1485.

⁶⁵ Williams, 'Princeps Merciorum gentis', p. 157. See Keynes, *Atlas*, Tables LII and LVI. Ælfhere's loyalty during the 957-959 split was rewarded even after the reunification of the kingdom as he witnessed in the first place among the ealdormen almost exclusively, often followed by his brother, Ælfheah, or the other Mercian ealdormen.

⁶⁶ Williams, 'Princeps Merciorum gentis', p. 158.

⁶⁷ *ONDB*, 'Ælfhere', Ann Williams [accessed 17 June 2012]. Stephen Baxter has argued that Ælfwine had a son Leofwine who started his own high-ranking family. Baxter's theory will be discussed more below.

sons, no document exists for the activities of Ælfweard but Ann Williams has tenuously linked Godwine with the Ealdorman Godwine of Lindsey who died at *Assadun* in 1016.⁶⁸

A final aspect necessary for our discussion is this family's links with other kin groups. Two charters, one issued by Eadwig and the other by Edgar name Ælfhere 'kinsman' to the king.⁶⁹ These ties of kinship to the royal line may explain the family's initial introductions at court and even the original appointment of Ealhhelm and undoubtedly, sheds light on Eadwig's favouritism towards Ealhhelm's sons. The new king wanted to shift the power in his kingdom away from Æthelstan 'Half-King' and his family. Appointing kinsmen to vacant ealdordoms represented a good way to secure loyalty and support at the beginning of a reign. This plan appears to have backfired on Eadwig, however, since Ælfhere sided with Edgar in the split of 957. Ælfhere and probably Ælfwine attended Edgar's court, while Ælfheah and Eadric remained in Eadwig's court. Ann Williams sums up this apparent familial split:

Although Ælfheah and Eadric had supported Eadwig, while Ælfhere and possibly Ælfwine followed Edgar, no break in family solidarity seems to have occurred. The kinsmen seem simply to have been hedging their bets. Edgar gave land to Ælfheah and perhaps Eadric also, as well as to Ælfhere and Ælfwine. The whole kin, it seems, shared in the fortune of their illustrious brother.⁷⁰

This family solidarity even when the kingdom split reveals an interesting aspect of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy. This tendency to stand by one another appears to have been the norm among high-ranking lay families in the late Anglo-Saxon period. Further demonstrating this practice, the exiled Ealdorman Leofsige of Essex had a sister, Æthelflæd, who had to forfeit her lands for helping him after his banishment.⁷¹ Again, the only recorded incident when a family blatantly did not side with one of its own members is the Godwinesons.

⁶⁸ Williams, 'Princeps Merciorum gentis', p. 170.

⁶⁹ See S 555 and S 582.

⁷⁰ See Williams, 'Princeps Merciorum gentis', p. 158.

⁷¹ See S 926.

Ælfhere's family appears to have connections to a larger kin group and if one of its members, Æthelweard the Chronicler, can be believed, they were descended from Æthelred I, King Alfred's older brother. The will of Ealdorman Ælfheah leaves an estate to his kinsman Æthelweard.⁷² Æthelweard may have had three siblings: a brother, Ælfweard, and two sisters Ælfwaru and Ælfgifu, quite possibly the woman briefly married to Eadwig.⁷³ Such a marriage would surely have helped any of her relatives who moved in or near the king's circle. A final member of this apparent extended kin group was Brihthelm whom Eadwig appointed the bishop of Winchester, a see with strong links to the West Saxon line.⁷⁴ While the prestige of Ælfhere's direct family appears to have fallen after his death, his kinsmen, the family of Æthelweard, survived into Cnut's reign. It remains unclear whether Ælfhere's family remained at the top of the lay aristocratic hierarchy for two or three generations, a fact that entirely depends on whether or not Godwine, Ealdorman of Lindsey was the son of Ælfheah of Hampshire.

The Family of Æthelweard the Chronicler

While all the major high-ranking families appear as patrons or even founders of monastic houses, Æthelweard and his son Æthelmær differ in that most records focused on their piety not their political activities. It certainly helps that they both gave patronage to the prolific writer Ælfric, whom Æthelmær chose as the first abbot of his new monastery at Eynsham in 1005. Still, perhaps this association with piety indicates something more. I do not propose that Æthelweard's family was more pious than other individuals in their day, a matter that cannot be judged. However, I would like to suggest that their familial piety and relationship with the Church may have differed from those of their contemporaries. In both the tenth and eleventh centuries, this particular family emerges as the only one on record who may have had a member enter the Church as a career path whose father and

⁷² *Wills*, no. 9

⁷³ See the will of an Ælfgifu which leaves estates to an Æthelweard and Ælfweard. See S 1484 and *Wills*, no. 80 and pp. 118-20.

⁷⁴ For a discussion of this see Yorke, 'Politics of the Tenth Century', 77 and *Wills*, nos. 8 and 9.

brother-in-law had served as ealdormen. As discussed in the first chapter, Æthelnoth received his appointment to the archbishopric of Canterbury in the same year and from the same king who exiled his apparent ealdorman brother-in-law, Æthelweard, (not be confused with Æthelnoth's own brother, executed in 1017). This family stands out as unusual for having such a close relative of an ealdorman or earl entering the Church. Indeed, by looking at the family trees of these five families, with the exception of Æthelnoth, no recorded sons ever entered the Church. This unique aspect may help explain the pious reputation of the family, yet the distinctive case of Archbishop Æthelnoth should be kept in mind not only in relation to his own family but also throughout any analysis of the Anglo-Saxon secular aristocracy. Æthelnoth's very uniqueness indicates much about late Anglo-Saxon society.

Æthelweard became ealdorman of the Western Provinces around 975 and held the position until his death, probably in 998. Once Æthelwine of East Anglia died in 992, his rival Ælfhere having predeceased him by nine years, Æthelweard witnessed first among the ealdormen.⁷⁵ It has been suggested, although it is by no means accepted by all, that Æthelweard was the brother to Ælfgifu, the woman briefly married to Eadwig.⁷⁶ As discussed above, Æthelweard's family may have had blood links with the family of ealdorman Ælfhere and this extended kin group rose to power at the expense of the descendants of Æthelstan 'Half-King'. If Æthelweard were Ælfgifu's brother, from her will there appears to have been another brother named Ælfweard, possibly Ælfweard *minster* who attested 964 to 974.⁷⁷

Æthelweard's son, Æthelmær, became an ealdorman but uncertainty exists over when and where. An ealdorman Æthelmær flourished between 995 and 1006 who seems to have had responsibilities in the east of the kingdom. Another ealdorman Æthelmær

⁷⁵ Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LXII.

⁷⁶ *ONDB*, 'Æthelweard', Patrick Wormald [accessed 18 June 2012]. Wormald gives a brief overview of who the Æthelweard in Ælfgifu's will (S 1484) might be if it is not the ealdorman of the Western Provinces. For family tree see Figure 7 above.

⁷⁷ *PASE*, Ælfweard 9.

appears in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 1013 at the head of the western thegns who submitted themselves to Swein.⁷⁸ While possibly two separate men, they could also be the same person.⁷⁹ Æthelweard's son may have received an ealdordom in 995 but he could not have replaced his father who was still alive and attesting at the top of the ealdormen. Yet, this Æthelmær disappears after 1006 when a reorganization of Æthelred's court took place with the culminating appointment of Eadric Streona as an ealdorman in Mercia. Stephen Baxter has provided a brief overview of this period while pointing out that this was actually the second restructuring of Æthelred's court.⁸⁰ The first restructuring occurred around 994, among other things, as a response to the increased Viking activity. If these two Æthelmærs are in fact the same man, then we can reconcile his flourishing between 995 and 1006 and his reappearance in 1013. Because of his father's prominence and his own ties to the royal family, Eadric may have considered Æthelmær a threat to his own growing influence and political power and manoeuvred to have the royal kinsman removed. Conversely Æthelmær may have foreseen his danger and perhaps voluntarily retired to the Western Provinces.

Æthelmær appears to have had two sons and a daughter; if more children existed they went unrecorded. Æthelmær apparently died in 1015 and his son Æthelweard was killed in Cnut's purge of 1017. Æthelmær's second son quite possibly was Æthelnoth who became archbishop of Canterbury in 1020.⁸¹ The ealdordom of the Western Provinces apparently went to Æthelmær's son-in-law, another Æthelweard but Cnut exiled him in 1020.⁸² Æthelweard's family held the same ealdordom for three generations, although the last member's reign ended in exile.

⁷⁸ ASC C s.a. 1013: '7 com Æpelmær ealdorman byder 7 þa western þegenas mid him.'

⁷⁹ Keynes attempts to trace these men in Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LXIII. Elsewhere he also suggests that if they are the same person, Æthelmær may have retired to Eynsham at this time. See Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 209.

⁸⁰ Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, pp. 20-21.

⁸¹ JW s.a. 1020. For a discussion of why this may well be Ealdorman Æthelmær see T. Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden; Boston, 2009), p. 81.

⁸² Ann Williams has suggested Æthelmær's daughter was named Æthelflæd. See A. Williams, *The World before Domesday: the English Aristocracy 900-1066* (London, 2008), Figure 1.1. PASE has no suggestions.

The Family of Leofwine of Mercia

This family's survival of both the Viking invasions and conquest and the Norman Conquest not only stands out in such times of upheaval but also places them as the aristocratic family to have retained a high-ranking office for longest.⁸³ Four generations held at least one earldom. The founder of the line, Leofwine, became ealdorman of the Hwicce in 994.⁸⁴ Before his appointment at least two thegns named Leofwine witness royal charters making his early career hard to trace. His father appears to have been named Ælfwine and Stephen Baxter has suggested we should identify him with Ælfwine in the Maldon poem who claims to come from a great Mercian family, more specifically to be descended from Ealdorman Ealhhelm.⁸⁵ The Ælfwine in the poem may have been the son of Ælfric *cild* making his mother sister to Ealdormen Ælfheah and Ælfhere.⁸⁶ If true, Leofwine could claim kinship with these men as their grand-nephew and probably had a familial network in Mercia. Leofwine appears to have retained his ealdordom throughout the Viking Invasions and, while going unnamed, probably still administered it when Cnut divided the kingdom into four parts.

Leofwine last attested in 1023 and may have taken over many of Eadric's responsibilities after the latter's death in the 1017 purge. Leofwine's oldest son Northman, who had begun to witness among the thegns, was also caught in Cnut's house cleaning of the remaining Anglo-Saxon aristocracy. Leofwine's next sons, Leofric and Eadwine did survive and appear to have become royal officials, probably sheriffs.⁸⁷ Leofric appears to have gained his Mercian earldom by the late 1020s and by the early 1030s began attesting in second place behind Godwine.⁸⁸ Leofric, like his father before him, had to survive several politically unstable times after Cnut's death and the rather

⁸³ Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, p. 17. See Figure 8 above.

⁸⁴ He is styled 'ealdorman of the provinces of the Hwicce' in a charter dated 997. See S 891.

⁸⁵ Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, p. 17 and 19.

⁸⁶ Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, p. 17 and 19.

⁸⁷ Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, pp. 32-33. Leofric was almost certainly the sheriff of Worcestershire serving under one of the Scandinavian earls in the West Midlands. Eadwine is harder to place but Baxter has suggested Shropshire as the place in which Eadwine served as sheriff.

⁸⁸ Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LXIX.

unexpected deaths of both Harold and Harthcnut within seven years of their father's demise. He also had to endure the dominance of the Godwine family during the first years of Edward the Confessor's reign.

In 1051, however, Edward the Confessor exiled the Godwinesons and appointed Leofric's son Ælfgar to replace Harold as earl of East Anglia.⁸⁹ This advancement gave the Leofwinesons control of most of the middle of the kingdom. Upon the restoration of the Godwinesons, Ælfgar lost his earldom but regained it in 1053 when Godwine's death caused Edward to transfer Harold to his father's earldom of Wessex. Ælfgar held East Anglia until his father's death in 1057, although the king exiled him twice during his tenure there. Edward transferred Ælfgar to his father's earldom in Mercia and East Anglia went to a younger Godwineson brother. After the death of Ralph the Timid, earl of Herefordshire, in the same year, Ælfgar found himself surrounded by Godwinesons during his entire tenure as earl of Mercia. His death is uncertain but probably occurred in 1062 or early 1063; his son Eadwine succeeded him as earl of Mercia.⁹⁰ In 1065 the Northumbrians rebelled against their earl, Tostig Godwineson, expelling him and demanding Eadwine's brother Morcar as their new official. Unlike the Godwinesons, both Eadwine and Morcar survived several years into the Norman Conquest. Eadwine died in the rebellion of 1071 while William the Conqueror deprived Morcar of Northumbria and imprisoned him until his death in 1087. One last member necessary to mention is Leofric's nephew and namesake who obtained the abbacy of Peterborough. Although it is unclear whether Eadwine and Morcar actually took part in the Hastings campaign, their cousin Abbot Leofric, was present at the Battle of Hastings thus

⁸⁹ Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, pp. 44-45. Ælfgar appears to have had some sort of office below the rank of earl in Essex in the mid-1040s. For example see Thurstan's will where Ælfgar witnesses above the sheriff of Essex. See *Wills*, no. 31.

⁹⁰ Most scholars believe Ælfgar must have been dead by 1063 when Harold and Tostig Godwineson invaded Wales against the Mercian earl's Welsh ally, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn. See Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, p. 47.

indicating that the Godwineson-Leofwineson rivalry might not have weakened the English national defence quite as much as scholars like Sir Frank Stenton suggested.⁹¹

The Family of Godwine

So much has been written on the Godwinesons that I shall here after only provide a very brief account of their two generations at the top of the lay elite.⁹² Godwine's father has been identified as Wulfnoth *cild* a thegn mentioned in both the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and ætheling Æthelstan's will (1014). The will calls him the father of Godwine who owned an estate at Compton.⁹³ Appointed to an earldom in the eastern part of Wessex around 1018, Godwine eventually rose to first place among the ealdormen in witness lists during Cnut's reign and earl of all Wessex. Godwine's power became especially evident in the early years of Edward the Confessor's reign when his two oldest sons, Swegn and Harold, as well as his wife's nephew, Beorn Estrithson, all held earldoms by 1046. In 1047 Edward exiled the oldest, Swegn, but restored him in 1050 (but not before the exile murdered his cousin, Beorn, in 1049). Edward the Confessor managed to outlaw the entire family in 1051 but had to restore them within the year. Swegn died in 1052 on pilgrimage and Godwine followed in 1053.

Harold succeeded his father as earl of all of Wessex and when in 1055 the earldom of Northumbria became vacant Harold's younger brother, Tostig, received it from the king. Between 1056 and 1057, Earls Ralph and Oda, the two lay officials not related to either the Godwinesons or the Mercian ealdorman family, and Leofric all died. Ælfgar took over the earldom of Mercia, East Anglia went to Gyrrh Godwineson

⁹¹ Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, p. 56.

⁹² For discussions on multiple aspects of the Godwineson family see Mason, *House of Godwine*; F. Barlow, *The Godwins: The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty* (Harlow, 2002); C. Senecal, 'Keeping up with the Godwinesons: In Pursuit of Aristocratic Status in late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Norman Studies, XXIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2000*, ed. J. Gillingham (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2001), pp. 251-66; N. J. Higham, 'Harold Godwinsson: The Construction of Kingship', in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. G. R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2005), pp. 19-34; and S. Baxter, 'Edward the Confessor and the succession question', in *Edward the Confessor*, ed. R. Mortimer (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2009), pp. 77-118.

⁹³ ASC C s.a. 1009 and *Wills*, no. 20. For family tree see Figure 9 above.

sometime between 1057 and 1059 and Leofwine Godwineson received an earldom in the south-west Midlands, probably around 1059. The family took a blow to their power when the Northumbrians exiled Tostig in 1065 but still had control of southern and eastern England. Harold, of course, became king in 1066 and married Ealdgyth the sister of Earls Eadwine and Morcar. Tostig invaded Northumbria with Harold Hardrada in September 1066 but died in the Battle of Stamford Bridge. The rest of the Godwineson brothers all died at Hastings.

SOME SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Before Cnut's reign, the major families who came to power as ealdormen all appear to be, or at least claimed to be, related in some way to the West Saxon royal line. Distantly connected but close enough to be kinsmen, they usually lost political influence when they became too powerful and a king wanted to 'restructure' his court like Eadwig and Æthelred II did during their reigns. For obvious reasons, the families that arose during Cnut's reign had no noticeable link to the West Saxon royal line, even if Leofwine was descended from Ealdorman Ealhhelm as Baxter has tentatively suggested, neither Æthelred nor Edward the Confessor ever apparently acknowledged such a link, and none of the Leofwines appear to have boasted of such a royal tie. The Godwinesons, of course, married into the royal family through Edith and obtained multiple earldoms. How secure Edward felt surrounded by this family which was not his own is another matter.

A comparative examination of these five families reveals several other major themes. They all had at least one member and generally two who acted as ealdormen for a number of years. For example, Æthelstan 'Half-King' and his son Æthelwine both ruled in East Anglia for at least thirty years each and Leofwine and his son Leofric both administered at least a part of Mercia for twenty-nine and thirty-one years respectively. Longevity was not the only reason for their success but it must have helped in the

establishment of an official in his administrative area, particularly if an ealdorman's patrimony did not lie within his ealdordom. Furthermore a long term of royal service provided ample opportunity for lengthy introduction of sons and brothers to the royal court. Offering these younger men not only a chance to witness among their social peers in charters but also access to either offices within the royal court (like Æthelsige, Edgar's royal chamberlain) or lower-ranking administrative offices as demonstrated by Leofwine's sons, Leofric and Eadwine who both appear to have held the office of sheriff as young men.⁹⁴

Along with long-living members, each of these families managed at some point to have two members holding separate earldoms. Often these administrative areas lay in two separate regions of the kingdom (Wessex, Mercia, East Anglia, and Northumbria). Having a second family member situated in an ealdordom in a separate region from that of the initial appointment probably brought one major kin group into conflict with other. The most obvious example is that of the Godwinesons and the family of Leofwine of Mercia, but Ann Williams has an interesting theory over the conflict between Æthelwine of East Anglia and Ælfhere of Mercia that involves ealdordoms held by previous family members on both sides.⁹⁵ Despite these two major rivalries, which helped to shape tenth- and eleventh-century politics, there are no marriages recorded between either the families of Ælfhere and Æthelstan 'Half-King' or the Godwinesons and Leofwinesons. Harold's marriage to Ealdgyth does not belong in this assessment since this union had more to do with Harold assuming the throne rather than settling a rivalry between two socially equal families, who sought to secure their positions as royal officials not as royal persons. These five families had many factors in their favour: long-lived members who held office for decades, the advancement of two or more members to the rank of ealdorman or earl during the same time period, and, in most cases, a claim, if only distant, as royal kinsmen.

⁹⁴ Obviously a family member who gained an office within the royal court like Ælfheah could also provide access to ealdordoms for his kinsmen.

⁹⁵ Williams, 'Princeps Merciorum gentis', 159-61.

Yet, none of these families lasted past four generations at the top of the lay elite and the Godwinesons only remained there for two. These men were powerful but the very fluidity of their social class perhaps indicates that these officials did not dominate the king's choice in appointments as they may have appeared. In the end, they served as royal agents and whether they owed their preferment to lineage or to their own merit, appointments still lay in the hands of the king. This is not an argument for the absolute power of Anglo-Saxon kings, there are cases where the local power base of an aristocrat probably forced a king's decision but neither does it appear that the aristocracy became so powerful that it could ignore the authority of the king.

A final similarity which emerges after a comparison of these families, and something that may be unique to the Anglo-Saxon period, is that the majority of these kin-groups had several recorded sons per generation and yet none of them entered the Church at an early age as an actual career path and not a retirement. Rather, those we can trace, all appear as wealthy and important thegns even if they never obtained an ealdordom or some other sort of royal office. The only exception is Æthelweard the Chronicler's possible grandson Æthelnoth who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1020. These families appear to have followed the example of the West Saxon royal line who also appear to have had no male members enter the Church as a child or young man. Even when a surplus of æthelings existed and led to a contested throne, as with the beginning of King Æthelstan's reign, none of the royal princes entered or were placed in the Church.⁹⁶ That royal and high-ranking aristocratic sons did not join the Church instead of seeking a political career brings into question how these men viewed the clerical positions. The absence of any recorded sons becoming clerics raises the strong possibility that it was not a career option for these men. Not that the Church would have not accepted them but rather these men did not see it as a proper route for sons and

⁹⁶ See Foot, *Æthelstan*, pp. 37-44. Foot shows that Æthelstan took care of all his male siblings but not one was placed in the Church.

younger brothers. Despite the fact that placing brothers or extra sons in the Church would have made certain kings' reigns much easier, it must for whatever reason have seemed unsuitable.

MERIT

While these five families occupied many of the ealdordoms and earldoms of the tenth and eleventh centuries, they did not control all of these administrative areas. Generally they had to work alongside fellow officials who had not received appointments because of their lineage. The following section contains an examination of the ealdormen and earls who did not have any other blood kinsmen appointed to a similarly high lay office. While lineage may have helped in some cases to begin their careers or at least enable them to attend court, some other factor appears to have led to their elevation to ealdormen. They, by some means, merited the king's attention and received rewards in the form of high office. A lack of documentation means many of these men remain little more than names. Some of these officials, however, appear in enough surviving records that we can trace their activities and at least some of their family members. Some had short careers while others performed their duties over decades. Certain ealdormen are remembered very highly, for example the poem *The Battle of Maldon* celebrates Byrhtnoth's heroic death. Other ealdormen, while not on the same level as the treachery of Eadric Streona, ended their careers more infamously. Four ealdormen will be discussed below to illustrate the idea of merit.

Ælfgar of Essex

Ælfgar, received the earldom of Essex in the mid-940s.⁹⁷ He may have first attested as an ealdorman in one of King Edmund's charters dated to 944, however, he can only be

⁹⁷ PASE, Ælfgar 9.

firmly established among the ealdormen in 946.⁹⁸ He continues to witness the royal charters of Eadred until he disappears after 951. Ælfgar proves interesting not so much for his career but rather for the wills he and his descendants left behind. Because of various clues in the text itself, including foremost that King Edmund had already died at the time of its production, Ælfgar could not have created his will any earlier than 946. From this document we learn that the ealdorman had three children, two daughters, Æthelflæd and Ælfflæd, who still lived and a son who had predeceased him.⁹⁹ Ælfgar bequeathed a number of estates in Essex and Suffolk.¹⁰⁰ This information is important because he appears to have had significant power in the eastern counties but none outside of that area.

His patrimony and officially appointed sphere of influence therefore lay in the same region of the kingdom. Before his appointment to the East Saxon ealdordom, Ælfgar's activities remain uncertain because of the popularity of his name. Yet, several things indicate his status as, at the very least, an important thegn. He possessed a number of estates as demonstrated by his will. More indicative, King Edmund deemed his line significant enough to choose Ælfgar's eldest daughter, Æthelflæd, for his second wife.

⁹⁸ See S 493. Many scholars believe he does not witness until 945 or 946 but there is an Ælfgar *dux* in this particular charter. David Dumville thinks it is authentic charter, which begs the question who is this Ælfgar if not the queen's father? See D. N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar: Six Essays on Political, Cultural, and Ecclesiastical Revival* (Woodbridge, 1992), p. 177. Keynes, however, does not include Ælfgar as attesting this document in his *Atlas* (See Table XLII). Although the *Atlas* also leaves out a Wulfgar *dux* or rather he replaces Wulfgar with a Æthelwold *dux* and adds an Eadric *dux* in the fourth spot, pushing Eallhelm and Æthelmund down into the fifth and sixth spots respectively. There may be a case for this not being Ælfgar, Æthelflæd's father since he does not witness again until S 517 (which is dated to 945 but is most likely spurious) and S 519 which is dated to 946. An Ælfgar witnesses among the thegns in 944 and 946 both of which are dealing with Christ Church, Canterbury. If the assumption that Æthelflæd married King Edmund in 944 is correct this may help to explain the single attestation in 944. Surely Ælfgar would have accompanied his daughter to the court for her marriage to the king. It is entirely possible then that he also witnessed a charter while escorting his daughter and the scribe may naturally have placed the father of the new queen among the highest secular witnesses. He may also have received his promotion during this period but returned to his home counties for a time before taking up his place at court—particularly since his daughter's marriage was so short. Instead of coming from Edmund, however, the ealdordom may have also come from his successor King Eadred in order to ensure that a powerful thegnly family did not make trouble or pursue too much power through a widowed queen.

⁹⁹ PASE, Æthelflæd 14 and Ælfflæd 13.

¹⁰⁰ M. Locherbie-Cameron, 'Byrhtnoth and his Family', in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. D. Scragg (Oxford, 1991), pp. 253-62 (p. 254) and C. Hart, 'The Ealdordom of Essex', in *An Essex Tribute: Essays presented to Frederick G. Emmison as a Tribute to his Life and Work for Essex History and Archives*, ed. K. Neale (London, 1987), pp. 57-84.

This honour may have resulted in Ælfgar's elevation to an ealdordom in his home counties. Because the extant sources do not record any criticism that Æthelflæd was unworthy to marry the king it seems safe to assume that this particular family exerted considerable influence in the east.¹⁰¹

Every other detail about Ælfgar's family remains uncertain. His wife probably bore the name Wiswyth if she is to be identified with the Wiswyth for whose soul Ælfgar donated an estate at Greenstead to Stoke;¹⁰² furthermore her family may have come from the Stour Valley region.¹⁰³ The community at Stoke-by-Nayland, to which Ælfgar and his children made a point to donate estates, may have actually been a favoured house of Wiswyth's family and thus reflected the honouring of a wife and mother.¹⁰⁴ This suggestion has merit as the other houses found in Ælfgar and his daughters' wills all tended to be larger communities. The sisters' wills also reveal a few more relatives but no indication of the degree of the connection. Æthelflæd's will bequeaths land to Sibriht and Ælfgeat each of whom she calls *megæ* or kinsman and to her *magan* or kinswoman, Crawe.¹⁰⁵ Ælfflæd's will provides a more interesting connection. She grants estates to an Ealdorman Æthelmær in return for his advocacy for herself during her life and protection of her family's favoured house at Stoke as well as ensuring the bequests contained in her will happened after her death.¹⁰⁶ This ealdorman, believed to be Æthelmær of the Western Provinces, son of Ealdorman Æthelweard may have had a distant kinship with either

¹⁰¹ Æthelflæd may have eventually married a second time to an Ealdorman Æthelstan. While it is possible that this was Æthelstan 'Half-King' it is much more likely that she married Æthelstan 'Rota', an ealdorman in Mercia. See *LE*, ii.63. Andrew Wareham has recently made an argument that this reference does not refer to Æthelflæd, Ælfgar's daughter and that she did indeed remain a royal widow. See Wareham, *Lords and Communities*, pp. 53-4 n30. The lack of any apparent children may support Wareham's theory since it seems strange that neither Æthelflæd nor her sister had any children (neither of their wills mentions donations for the souls of children or nieces and nephews).

¹⁰² *Wills*, no. 2. In his will, Ælfgar grants the Greenstead estate to Stoke for his soul, the soul of Wiswyth and that of Æthelweard. Earlier in his will he grants three estates to his eldest daughter for the zealous care of his soul, the souls of her mother and brother, as well as her own.

¹⁰³ Wareham, *Lords and Communities*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁴ Wareham, *Lords and Communities*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁵ *Wills*, no. 14. Nothing is known about these three people, although Crawe is mentioned again in Ælfflæd's will. Dorothy Whitelock has suggested that Sibriht may be the same man mentioned in *Battle of Maldon* (ll. 280-284) as the brother of the warrior Ætheric. See *Wills*, p. 141.

¹⁰⁶ *Wills*, no. 15.

Ælfflæd or her husband. The uncertainty arises from a gap in the manuscript but a case can be made for Æthelmær having a familial connection to either.¹⁰⁷ Ælfflæd's husband, Byrhtnoth, may have been related to the Mercian family of Ealdorman Ælfhere. This Mercian family in turn also appears to have kinship links with the family of Ealdorman Æthelweard. A possible direct connection between Æthelmær and Ælfflæd's proves harder to support and in some ways those who suggest this theory based it on what Ælfflæd did not do. She does not appear to have had children but Byrhtnoth did, a daughter named Leofflæd. Leofflæd married into a socially lower but still significant local family with extensive holdings.¹⁰⁸ Yet, Ælfflæd makes no bequests to or asks anything of Leofflæd or her family but instead turned to a kin-group across the kingdom to ensure that her bequests went to the correct recipients. Finally, while by no means an indication of certain kinship, a similarity in names appears, Æthelmær's father and son as well as Ælfflæd's deceased brother all bore the name Æthelweard.

Despite making two important marriages neither of Ælfgar's daughters appear to have had any children or at least any that survived long enough to warrant documenting although the ealdorman's will presumed they would. Thus, Ælfgar's line ended with the death of his younger daughter. His lack of male heirs obviously contributed to the absence of anymore ealdormen from this family. Yet, as we shall see with the discussion of Ealdorman Ordgar, a kin-group chosen to marry into the royal family could have sons and still only have one member appointed to an ealdordom. Lineage could have a major impact on appointment of royal agents but it was not the only factor in many cases.

Byrhtnoth of Essex

Appointed in 956 by King Eadwig, Byrhtnoth appears to have followed the brief career of Byrhtferth who seems to have held the ealdordom of the East Saxons from 955 to 956.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ *Wills*, pp. 144-45.

¹⁰⁸ *Wills*, p. 145.

¹⁰⁹ *PASE*, Byrhtnoth 1 and Beorhtfrith 9.

Given similarities in their names Byrhtferth and Byrhtnoth, may have belonged to the same kin-group, perhaps even as close as uncle and nephew.¹¹⁰ No concrete evidence exists to connect the two men beyond the fact that they share the same *OE* Byrht- root. Even C. R. Hart who suggested the possible uncle-nephew relationship did so with ‘some misgivings’.¹¹¹ More interesting than a tentative link with his immediate predecessor, Byrhtnoth had a very strong connection with Ælfgar, the ealdorman who held the area before Byrhtferth.

As discussed above, Ealdorman Ælfgar’s will survives and can be dated 946 x 951.¹¹² This document reveals that the ealdorman’s younger daughter Ælfflæd¹¹³ had married Byrhtnoth. The link between father-in-law and son-in-law may have influenced Byrhtnoth’s eventual elevation to Ælfgar’s ealdordom. A similar situation appears in the ealdordom of Mercia in the 980s when Ælfric succeeded his brother-in-law, Ælfhere. Furthermore, Byrhtnoth’s marriage may have been part of a plan to provide Ælfgar with a male heir, his only son having died by the time of he made his will and his oldest daughter recently a royal widow. Yet, from the surviving documentation there was more to the story and some other factor may have motivated Ælfgar to include Byrhtnoth in his family.

Byrhtnoth appears to have originated in Mercia and may have been descended from the Mercian royal house.¹¹⁴ The *Battle of Maldon* names Byrhtnoth as the son of Byrthelm.¹¹⁵ A man bearing the name Byrthelm witnessed several charters between

¹¹⁰ Hart, 'Ealdordom of Essex', p. 69.

¹¹¹ Hart, 'Ealdordom of Essex', p. 69. Working on the assumption that Byrhtferth was an uncle to Ealdorman Byrhtnoth, Margaret Locherbie-Cameron has tenuously suggested, based on name similarities, that Abbot Byrhtnoth of Ely may have been the son of Byrhtferth and thus Byrhtnoth’s cousin. Because the great families appear to have kept their sons out of the Church it seems some-what improbable that a man who gained such a high public office would have placed his son in a monastery, even one of the great Fenland houses. See Locherbie-Cameron, 'Byrhtnoth and his Family', p. 253.

¹¹² See *Wills*, no. 2.

¹¹³ *PASE*, Ælfflæd 13.

¹¹⁴ Hart, 'Ealdordom of Essex', pp. 69-70.

¹¹⁵ B. Griffiths, *The Battle of Maldon* (Pinner, 2000), l. 92: 'Byrhtelmes bearn'.

930 and 940 among the thegns but nothing else is known about him.¹¹⁶ The poem also indicates that Byrhtnoth had a nephew, Wulfmær, from an unnamed sister.¹¹⁷ Wulfmær's father remains unknown but since he fought beside his uncle Byrhtnoth, most have assumed his father had already died or was of little consequence socially.¹¹⁸ Byrhtnoth may also have had a brother named Byrhtic; three documents from 956 grant adjacent estates at Tadmarton in Oxfordshire to a Byrhtnoth, Byrhtic, and Ealdorman Byrhtnoth. Because of the later donation of all three estates in these grants as one composite gift to St Mary's, Abingdon, it appears that the two Byrhtnoths are one and the same person and kinsman with Byrhtic.¹¹⁹ Because Byrhtnoth became an ealdorman in 956, it is a strong possibility that he received one estate before his promotion and one afterwards. A Byrhtic attests among the thegns from 958 to 969. After 969 more than one Byrhtic appears in the witness lists until 974 when all attestors with this name vanish.¹²⁰

Returning to the *Maldon* poem, its author places a speech in the mouth of a warrior named Ælfwine. He claims kinship with the slain Byrhtnoth but only after describing his own lineage.¹²¹ Ælfwine says he comes from a great family in Mercia and names his grandfather as Ealdorman Ealhhelm.¹²² This information supports that Byrhtnoth himself was Mercian. If Ælfwine did in fact come from the family of Ealhhelm this means he also had links to Ealdormen Ælfhere and Ælfheah, administrators of Merica and Wessex respectively. Such important relatives may have influenced Byrhtnoth's own elevation to an ealdordom in 956—the same year as Ælfhere. Both of these men received appointments from Eadwig when he restructured his court after his ascension to the throne. Still, Byrhtnoth had married into an ealdorman's family up to a decade before his appointment when Eadwig was just a young child. His connections may have brought

¹¹⁶ Keynes, *Atlas*, Tables XXXIX and XXXIXa.

¹¹⁷ Griffiths, *The Battle of Maldon*, ll. 114-15.

¹¹⁸ Locherbie-Cameron, 'Byrhtnoth and his Family', p. 254.

¹¹⁹ Locherbie-Cameron, 'Byrhtnoth and his Family', p. 254. See S 611, S 617, and S 618.

¹²⁰ See Keynes, *Atlas*, Tables LI (3 of 6) and LVII (1-5 of 15).

¹²¹ Griffiths, *The Battle of Maldon*, l. 224.

¹²² Griffiths, *The Battle of Maldon*, ll. 217-19: 'þæt ic wæs on Myrcon miccles cynnes; / wæs min ealda fæder Ealhhelm haten, / wis ealdorman woruldgeseæg'.

about this marriage or he may have done something to merit the king's attention. After all, he must have married Ælfflæd during King Edmund's reign, meaning he became the brother-in-law of Queen Æthelflæd. While Ælfhere and Ælfheah were royal kinsmen they did not receive such treatment. Byrhtnoth must have done something to gain such favour. Unfortunately, we have reached the point where the lack of evidence for his early career becomes frustrating and must be left to guesswork. Why did a West Saxon king allow the marriage of a Mercian thegn into a powerful Essex family? Particularly a family he had married into himself.

Like Ælfgar, Byrhtnoth had no surviving sons. He did, however, have a daughter named Leofflæd who does not appear to have been the child of his wife Ælfflæd; whether Leofflæd was illegitimate or not is unknown. She married Oswig a member of a local family with extensive lands in north-east Cambridgeshire and western Suffolk.¹²³ Based on their donations to Ely Abbey, Oswig's kin-group was a wealthy family but, unlike Byrhtnoth, none held public office.¹²⁴ Beyond their uninterest in or perhaps inability to obtain any kind of secular office Oswig's family appear more open to allowing sons to enter the Church. Both Leofflæd and Oswig's son, Ælfwine, and his first cousin (paternal), Æthelmær, became monks at Ely. Ælfwine had three sisters, one of whom formed a small community of nuns at Coveney (Cambridgeshire) and another, Leofwaru, who married Lustwine and produced a son Thurstan whose will survived.¹²⁵ Thurstan appears to have had a son Askil but nothing is known about him. With Askil, the family of Byrhtnoth fades into historical obscurity but it appears to have happened long after the family had disappeared from the national political scene.

Byrhtnoth had a long career, holding the ealdordom of Essex from 956 until his death in 991. Like his father-in-law, Byrhtnoth's lack of sons posed a problem for him to

¹²³ Wareham, *Lords and Communities*, p. 69. Wareham bases this on the *LE*, ii.67-8.

¹²⁴ Wareham, *Lords and Communities*, p. 69.

¹²⁵ Locherbie-Cameron, 'Byrhtnoth and his Family', p. 256-57 and n17 for Lustwine's family connections. For Thurstan's will see *Wills*, no. 31.

have a close kinsman in public office. Also, like Ælfgar, Byrhtnoth appears on the kingdom-wide political scene with no apparent help from any familial member and thus somehow merited the king's attention. Unlike, Ælfgar, however, Byrhtnoth's daughter did not marry a man higher or even equal to her socially. It could be argued that Byrhtnoth may have been deemed socially lower as a thegn than the daughter of an ealdorman but his marriage to Ælfflæd may have taken place before Ælfgar's appointment and thus they may have married as social equals. Even if their marriage did take place after Ælfgar became an ealdorman, it is likely they had belonged to a similar social class. Leofflæd's marriage, therefore is interesting and may point towards one of two things. First, Byrhtnoth's daughter was illegitimate which made her a desirable wife for a man of a lower social standing but was of no interest to men of the highest secular office. Or secondly, as Andrew Wareham has discussed, Byrhtnoth, like many tenth-century nobles, may have started focusing on strengthening local ties often to the detriment of 'national' power and influence.¹²⁶

Ordgar of Devon and Cornwall

Ordgar shares several similarities with the Ælfgar of Essex.¹²⁷ His early background remains somewhat unclear and we know little about his social standing. His daughter married a king, and he obtained an ealdordom in the same region in which his patrimony lay. The uniqueness of his name makes it easier to find Ordgar among the thegns during the early part of career but he does not appear outside of witness lists during these years.¹²⁸ He first attests in 958 and witnesses at least one charter per year as a *minister* until his appointment. H. P. R. Finberg suggested that Ordgar's patrimony in Devon may have lain near to the original familial lands of Æthelstan 'Half-King' and that these two

¹²⁶ Wareham, *Lords and Communities*, for a general discussion see pp. 1-12 and more specifically for Byrhtnoth, p. 69.

¹²⁷ *PASE*, Ordgar 5.

¹²⁸ See Keynes, *Atlas*, LI and LVII. In general Ordgar appears to rise through the ranks of the thegns, and attests in third and fourth place respectively in his last two charters before he became an ealdorman.

families were neighbours.¹²⁹ The eventual marriage of Æthelstan's son, Æthelwold, and Ordgar's daughter, Ælfthryth¹³⁰ may support this theory. C.R. Hart's theory that this marriage may have originally formed part of a plan to position Æthelwold as an ealdorman in western Wessex does not negate the possibility of these men being neighbours and may help to explain why Æthelstan, the most powerful ealdorman of his period, chose Ordgar's daughter to wed his eldest son.¹³¹

While a personal relationship between Æthelwold's father and Ælfthryth's seems entirely possible, perhaps just as likely (if not more so) that Ordgar's kin group had wealthy and influence in the western region of Wessex and these qualities attracted the 'Half-King'. If Æthelstan intended to place Æthelwold in such a position as to be able to administer an ealdordom in Wessex he would have sought a family with enough local influence to ease his son's relocation from East Anglia back to the family's original patrimony in the west of the kingdom. Unlike Ælfgar, Ordgar did not need to seek a male heir, having a son, Ordulf,¹³² who would outlive him. Therefore, to gain the attention of a powerful ealdorman's son for a first husband and King Edgar as a second, Ælfthryth must have belonged to an influential family of her own. Like Æthelflæd before her, no criticisms survive of Ælfthryth's lineage being unworthy of queen.¹³³ The accusation, by later writers, that her beauty attracted first Æthelwold and later Edgar may not be purely romanticizing her story, but it also cannot be the only reason both men married her rather than making her a mistress or concubine. It seems very likely that her family had high social status in Wessex even if only at a local and regional level.

¹²⁹ H. P. R. Finberg, 'The House of Ordgar and the Foundation of Tavistock Abbey', *The English Historical Review*, 58 (1943), 190-201 (p. 190).

¹³⁰ *PASE*, Ælfthryth 8.

¹³¹ Hart, 'Half-King', 127-28.

¹³² *PASE*, Ordulf 4.

¹³³ Later writers would criticize and cast her in the role of evil step-mother because of the death of her step-son Edward the Martyr. See *LE*, ii.56 for Ælfthryth's supposed murder of an abbot. For her involvement in Edward the Martyr's death see *LE* ii.56, *GR*, ii.162.2, and *JW* s.a. 978. Some would also insinuate that her great beauty was what attracted both her spouses and that she plotted with King Edgar to remove her first husband, Ealdorman Æthelwold of East Anglia. See *GR*, ii.157.2.

After marrying Ælfthryth in 964, King Edgar appointed her father to an ealdordom in that same year. According to John of Worcester he became the ealdorman of 'Dumnonia'.¹³⁴ At this point 'Dumnonia' included both Devon and Cornwall for administrative purposes.¹³⁵ Ordgar oversaw this area until his death in 971. He attested in third or fourth position for most of his career, and actually often witnessed ahead of both Ealdormen Æthelwine and Byrhtnoth, even though he was the junior official.¹³⁶ Edgar's favour to his wife and father-in-law does not appear to have extended to his brother-in-law because he did not appoint Ordulf as a replacement for his father. Although Edgar does not appear to have provided any sort of successor to Ordgar and perhaps rather than disfavour, Ordulf may simply have been too young for such an important position. He does not appear in the witness lists at all until 975, right before Edgar's death, and then disappears again until 980.¹³⁷ As the maternal uncle of Æthelred, Ordulf must have known he would find little welcome at the court of Edward the Martyr.¹³⁸ Unlike Edgar, Edward did not appear to have hesitated in appointing a new ealdorman to western Wessex. He placed a distant royal kinsman, Æthelweard, in an office styled ealdorman of the Western Provinces effectively cutting off any chance Ordulf had of gaining his father's position.

After his nephew, Æthelred, gained the throne, Ordulf does appear among the witness lists consistently between 982 and 1005 and may have lived until 1010.¹³⁹ Despite his continual presence at Æthelred's court, Ordulf seems to have never achieved ealdorman status. All of his appearances label him *minister* or *miles*. Even with Ealdorman Æthelweard's death c. 998, Ordulf never received an ealdorman title and the ealdordom of the Western Provinces eventually passed first to Æthelweard's son and then

¹³⁴ JW s.a. 961, 964, and 971.

¹³⁵ Finberg, 'House of Ordgar', 190.

¹³⁶ Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LVI.

¹³⁷ See S 802 and S 837.

¹³⁸ Finberg, 'House of Ordgar', 191-2. Finberg suggested that Ordulf may have occupied himself with the founding of Tavistock Abbey during this time.

¹³⁹ Finberg, 'House of Ordgar', 193.

his grandson-in-law. Ordulf, however, probably did not completely lack a secular title. John of Worcester records that he became the *primas* or high-reeve of Dumonia a significant title in itself but not the highest secular one.¹⁴⁰ Finberg suggested, based on an apparent later inscription found at Tavistock and a single line in the *vita* of this abbey's patron saint, that Ordulf may have acted as an ealdorman but with an administrative sphere confined to Cornwall and a hundred in Devon.¹⁴¹ Ordulf never attested among the ealdorman in any surviving document, however, exposing an inherent weakness in Finberg's suggestion. Any bestowing of a title found only in sources relating to Tavistock must be regarded as the house's attempt at glorifying their founder's legend and therefore cannot be trusted without supporting evidence from other sources.¹⁴²

Obviously as close relatives of King Æthelred this family would not have fared very well under the conqueror Cnut. Yet, it seems they did not disappear entirely. Between 1031 and 1050 an Ordgar¹⁴³ attests charters as a thegn and an Ordulf¹⁴⁴ appears in the witness lists from 1044 to 1050x59 and also in the Domesday Book as one of the largest landowners in Devon. Unlike other families, the Ord- root remained uncommon enough that given the placement of their familial holdings as well as name similarities it seems very likely that the second Ordgar and Ordulf were Ealdorman Ordgar's grandson and great-grandson respectively. Neither of these men appears to have had any sort of secular title, although reeves or high-reeves may not have always recorded as such. If John of Worcester provided the correct information concerning the first Ordulf serving as the high-reeve in Cornwall and Devon his son and grandson may have acted in a similar capacity. Since they do not appear to have attended court with the regularity that he did

¹⁴⁰ JW s.a. 997. It should be noted that J. Bray and P. McGurk chose to translate *primatis* as ealdorman.

¹⁴¹ Finberg, 'House of Ordgar', 192.

¹⁴² There is also a strong possibility that later monks confused Ordulf with his father Ordgar because of the similarities in names. John of Worcester did confuse them and attribute Tavistock's founding to Ordgar rather than Ordulf. See JW s.a. 961.

¹⁴³ PASE, Ordgar 7. He also had two brothers Ælfgar 51 and Esbern 4, see S 1474.

¹⁴⁴ PASE, Ordulf 6 and 7.

they may have actually performed their duties personally to a greater extent than their ancestor.

Ordgar's family provides an interesting contrast with the kin-groups of Ælfgar and Byrhtnoth. All three either married a well-connected woman or used one of their close female relatives to secure important connections. All three became the only males in their family to hold the title of ealdorman. Ordgar, however, stands out in two important ways. First, he himself had a son who would outlive him. Second, his female relative provided her husband with a male heir, in this case a future king. Yet, his family still did not gain more than one ealdordom and did not even manage to secure the passing of the title from father to son. Ealdormen titles were by no means hereditary and no guarantee existed that a son would inherit his father's office. A significant amount of time seems to have passed between Ealdorman Ordgar's death in 971 and the appointment of a successor in 975x976. This raises the question, of whether Ordulf was too young. It also may indicate that Ordulf proved unable to make a proper impression on King Edgar. A third option worth considering, Ealdorman Ordgar may not have possessed the same level of shrewdness in court politics as some of his fellow officials whose close blood relatives did receive appointments to various ealdordoms. After all, as the father of a woman who some Churchmen and secular officials stressed as the legitimate queen because of her coronation, he must have had an honoured place. Yet, he seemed unable to capitalize upon it in order to gain higher preferment for his own heir.

Ælfric of Hampshire

Ælfric, ealdorman of central Wessex between c. 982-1016, stands in juxtaposition to Byrhtnoth.¹⁴⁵ The surviving evidence paints a picture of Ælfric much closer to that of Eadric Streona. Ælfric received his ealdordom sometime after the death of the previous

¹⁴⁵ *PASE*, Ælfric 87. *PASE* is more ambiguous about his start date, suggesting a more open ended situation with ?x992-1016. Because of the amount of influence Ælfric appears to have exerted it seems much more likely that the earlier date c. 982 is likely. The '992' in the *PASE* database may also be a typo.

ealdorman of the area, Æthelmær (not Ealdorman Æthelweard's son) in 982. Little is known about Ælfric, in part because of the multiple thegns who bore this name, and partly because later sources sometimes confuse him with Ælfric *cild* (ealdorman in Mercia 983-985).¹⁴⁶ Therefore, while it would be gratifying as a historian to be able to say that the Ælfric, which the Abingdon additions to John of Worcester's *Chronicon* called *maior domus regiae*¹⁴⁷ was the ealdorman of Hampshire and thus was probably some sort of royal official before his appointment c. 982, it remains impossible to know whether this referred to the West Saxon Ælfric or the Mercian one.

A position as a royal official would explain why Æthelred picked Ælfric as one of the first of the 'new men' the young king appointed upon reaching his majority. The administrative unit he received also indicates something about Ælfric: that he was indeed 'one of those in who the king trusted most'.¹⁴⁸ His ealdordom of Hampshire, Wiltshire and quite possibly Berkshire, constituted the heartland of Wessex; the power base of the English kings. Despite Æthelred's apparent trust in Ælfric by appointing him to this key location, others did not view the aristocrat so kindly. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* becomes quite critical of him, particularly in reference to the Danish attacks of 992 and 1003 and indicates that he acted cowardly and may have betrayed the English forces—although never to the extent that Eadric Streona later did.

Two other incidents appear to reflect badly on this particular ealdorman. A charter dated to 993 in which Æthelred confirms Abingdon Abbey's privileges, claims the king had been led to reduce these rights in his youth by Bishop Wulfgar [Rambury] and Ealdorman Ælfric.¹⁴⁹ The charter's condemnation of this particular ealdorman does not end here, rather it recorded that Ælfric bought from the king the abbacy of Abingdon for

¹⁴⁶ A. Williams, *Æthelred the Unready: The Ill-Counselled King* (London, 2003), 168, n18 and n27.

¹⁴⁷ See JW s.a. 985 and p. 613.

¹⁴⁸ ASC s.a. 992: 'Ac Ælfric ealderman, an of þan þa se cing hæfde mæst truwe to.'

¹⁴⁹ See S 876.

his brother Edwin.¹⁵⁰ Edwin held the abbacy of Abingdon c. 984-c.990 and appears to have given some of the abbey's lands to his kinsmen, including Ælfric's son, Ælfgar.¹⁵¹ Thus, in one charter Ælfric was accused of greed, being a bad influence on the young king, and simony. The *Chronicle* records that in that same year 'the king had Ælfgar, son of Ealdorman Ælfric, blinded'.¹⁵² The chronicler provided no reason for the mutilation but this would have severely hurt the family's status and political clout. Ælfgar, who had started witnessing royal charters about decade before his mutilation, held the position of royal reeve and may have also served as the sheriff of Berkshire.¹⁵³ Based on the activities of Ælfric's contemporary, Ealdorman Leofwine and his sons, particularly Leofric and Eadwine, who almost certainly acted as the sheriffs of specific shires, Ælfgar was on a route that could have led to an ealdordom of his own at some point in the future. Ann Williams has suggested that the timing of Ælfgar's blinding may have something to do with the confirmation of Abingdon's rights.¹⁵⁴ While I have seen no proof that this could not be the case it must be wondered if other courtiers or even the king himself was uncomfortable with the power the ealdorman of Hampshire and the abbot of Abingdon would have held in the royal family's own powerbase if they were working together. Edwin's death would have weakened this kin-group's power but perhaps there was still

¹⁵⁰ PASE, Edwin 15. We thus see Ælfric acting like the typical view of a medieval aristocrat. He secures a position for himself and then goes about obtaining higher positions for his family members in both ecclesiastical and secular offices. Yet, among Anglo-Saxon nobles, he appears to be an anomaly as a high-ranking secular official who had a brother in a similarly high ecclesiastical position and bribed the king to allow it. Given the location of Abingdon and Ælfric's administrative area, these two brothers must have had a fairly strong hold on the heartlands of Wessex. This would have provided an potentially dangerous position for an Anglo-Saxon king to be in, particularly in his own powerbase.

¹⁵¹ Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p. 26.

¹⁵² ASC s.a. 993: 'se cyning ablendan Ælfgar Ælfrices sunu ealdormannes.'

¹⁵³ Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p. 23. Examining his place in the witness lists, he is often in the top five spots among the thegns; from 986 to 988 he is in the first or second spot. In 988 he drops down the lists again, although still generally in the top ten places before appearing in the first spot again in 990. He was then blinded c. 993 and is not heard from again, see Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LXIII. One further point about this family, Edwin witnesses several royal charters as Abbot of Abingdon, usually in the second or third place among abbots. His last two attestations, however, he witnesses in the ninth spot and it is entirely possible that his reputation for abusing his position and providing followers with Church lands may have caught up with him and the king's displeasure was shown through a drop in his place among the abbots. Edwin's last two attestations coincided with Ælfgar's third and second to last.

¹⁵⁴ Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p. 26.

some fear that Ælfric remained too powerful and the mutilation of his son would check this influence.

Despite the failures of certain campaigns against the Vikings, the negative reaction to his influence over the king, voiced in the charter discussed above, and the decisive removal of his son from the political sphere, Ælfric rose through the ranks of ealdormen. By 993 he was attesting in the second position and after Ealdorman Æthelweard's death in 998, Ælfric witnessed first among the ealdormen until he was ousted from that position by Eadric Streona.¹⁵⁵ Ælfric would continue in his duties until his death in 1016 at the battle of *Assandun* fighting for Edmund Ironside.¹⁵⁶ He was the longest-serving of Æthelred's 'new men' but after 993 there does not appear any hope that another member of this family would obtain an ealdordom. In fact, we have no other knowledge about this family except the possible names of Ælfric's and Ælfgar's wives or sisters (Wulfgifu and Ælfgifu, respectively), no other siblings or children have been recorded. Like Byrhtnoth, Ælfric of Hampshire demonstrates that a man who has no traceable blood link with the royal family or with another contemporary ealdorman could still obtain the highest the secular office. Also, like Byrhtnoth, a long life could lead to a long career in such an office, but a lack of living male relatives made building and consolidating power at court impossible. This fact is most easily demonstrated by Eadric Streona's replacement of Ælfric in the first position among ealdormen in the witness lists, even though Eadric was the much junior official in terms of years of service. Compared to Ordgar, Ælfric appears to have played the court politics to his favour in regards to his son, placing Ælgar on a route that would most likely have ended in an ealdordom. Fate or rather the king's anger stepped in in 993, however, leaving Ælfric at the top of the secular aristocracy but with no familial safety net with which to protect himself.

¹⁵⁵ Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LXII.

¹⁵⁶ ASC DE s.a. 1016.

MERIT MIXED WITH LINEAGE BASED EALDORMEN

These four men illustrate that not all Anglo-Saxon ealdormen came from the same five families. In certain aspects they also show how difficult it could be to obtain more than one such high appointment and the existence of grown sons did not guarantee that a title would stay within a family. The four men discussed in this section are not the only secular officials that came to the king's attention and were promoted to ealdorman status without the apparent assistance of other high-ranking blood kinsmen. Eadric Streona and Godwine of Wessex stand as perfect examples of the men who appear to have received appointments based on some sort of merit. Even between these two men the results emerge as startlingly different. Both arose out of obscure backgrounds to become the premier ealdorman of their time but Eadric's family never produced more than one ealdorman, while each one of Godwine's sons at one point held the highest secular office. Obviously various political situations made these two men's careers different but it also demonstrates the instability of being at the top of the secular hierarchy.

Ælfric of Hampshire only provides one example of an ealdorman who appears to have held lower level offices before his appointment. Leofsige, ealdorman of Essex (994-1002) remains most famous for his banishment from the kingdom in 1002 after killing a king's reeve.¹⁵⁷ According to a charter, however, Leofsige spent the earlier part of his career as a *satraps* or official for the king.¹⁵⁸ Not much else is known of Leofsige's background except that he had a sister who forfeited her lands because she aided him after his banishment. Ælfric and Leofsige demonstrate a traceable path of service in a lower office leading to appointment to a higher one. This path did not always base appointment on merit alone, however, and examining lower offices reveals sometimes that the lines of merit and lineage can become blurred.

¹⁵⁷ ASC C, s.a. 1002. See PASE, Leofsige 17. For a brief overview and analysis of his career see Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁸ See S 926.

Besides Ælfric and Leofsige, Ælfheah (Wessex, 959-972), Leofric (Mercia, c. 1026-1057), and Ælfgar (East Anglia 1053-1057 and Mercia, 1057-1062) all appear acting as lower royal officials before their elevation to high secular positions. The major difference between these three men and Ælfric and Leofsige being that the latter all had at least one family member who had already obtained the title of ealdorman or earl. Thus it appears some ealdormen and earls in the earlier parts of their careers gained other royal offices because of a combination of merit and lineage. Lineage may have brought them to the king's attention but perhaps the performance of their duties in a lower office merited the appointment to a higher one. For example, Earl Leofric's brother Eadwine acted in some sort of royal capacity in the Midlands and may possibly have been the sheriff of Shropshire but never obtained an earldom.¹⁵⁹

Of course, some men may have held power equivalent to an ealdorman without ever holding the title. For example, Æthelsige, brother to Ealdorman Æthelwine served as Edgar's chamberlain for several years, which probably made him very influential at court but the king never provided him with his own ealdordom. King Æthelred's maternal grandfather became an ealdorman, but the king never made any move to place his uncle Ordulf in such a position. This fact does not mean Ordulf lacked influence at court. Indeed, Æthelred's making his uncle as high-reeve may reveal a new form of favouritism as will be discussed more in depth below. The emergence of this new type of office may explain why the sons of ealdormen beginning in Æthelred's reign start to appear in charters in ways that suggest they served the king as shire-reeves or sheriffs. A new way to power for those who had a lineage to recommend them to the king and a way for the king to reward those who had merited his attention if an ealdordom had perhaps not become vacant at the right time or possibly the king wanted to introduce new men into his

¹⁵⁹ Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, p. 32.

system of royal agents without giving them the power and lands that went with being an ealdorman.

ROYAL REEVES

In the eleventh century, a new type of royal official emerges that of the reeve or sheriff.¹⁶⁰ Men held the title reeve or high-reeve before the eleventh century and indeed the office itself seems to have come into use, or systematic use, during Æthelred's reign or as George Molyneaux has argued recently, even earlier under Edgar.¹⁶¹ The reeve appears to have performed similar duties to ealdormen and bishops collecting money, hearing judicial disputes and organizing military forces.¹⁶² Molyneaux has suggested that these three offices (ealdormen, bishops, and reeves) acted as power-checks on each other. He does however qualify this suggestion further by noting that these three positions should not be seen as at odds with each other but rather as complementary roles. Instead, reeves would 'often have been more able than either bishops or ealdormen to attend to the local detail of royal administration, since they did not have obligations associated with high ecclesiastical office, and were usually responsible for just a single shire.'¹⁶³ Having someone at the local level to implement royal orders potentially provided the king with more power throughout the kingdom as it extended his reach into the localities. Sheriffs also appear to have come from less socially well-to-do families and many do not seem to have any connections with high-ranking secular officials. Therefore receiving appointments as royal reeves made most of these men more dependent on the king and

¹⁶⁰ J. A. Green, *English Sheriffs to 1154* (London, 1990), p. 9. The earliest description of this office comes from Cnut's reign. Mostly recently James Lloyd has suggested that shire-reeves go back possibly to Æthelstan's reign. While Lloyd's theory is interesting, the sources do not support the existence of reeves with shire-wide responsibilities at such an early date. See J. Lloyd, 'Reeves as Agents of Royal Government in the English Shires, From the Reign of Alfred to Domesday Book', (Ph.D., University of Cambridge, 2014).

¹⁶¹ G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 179-182.

¹⁶² Molyneaux, *Formation*, p. 179.

¹⁶³ Molyneaux, *Formation*, p. 180.

likely earned the resentment of ealdormen.¹⁶⁴ The smaller units not only provided a more local touch but they also required a less wealthy (and less independent) man to run them. The king would thus obviously have to provide less or even no lands at all to facilitate a reeve's position at the local level. It was probably also easier for the king to reclaim lands given in connection with reeve positions than ealdordoms.

The apparent increase of sheriffs, seemingly in place of ealdormen, appears in Æthelred's reign when the number of ealdormen in the witness lists drops.¹⁶⁵ If one maps the traceable named ealdormen in this reign, some do not attest very often, a marked decrease in the number of ealdordoms awarded to royal agents appears during the late 980s and 990s. This decrease appears before the severity of the Viking attacks became fully realized. An increase in ealdormen occurred in the first decades of the eleventh century, with a particular concentration of appointments in the northern and eastern parts of the country. All of this indicates that reeves were becoming more important to the king. When viewed in this light, Æthelred's apparent lack of interest in appointing his maternal uncle, Ordulf to any ealdordom and only naming him a high-reeve takes on new significance. Rather than merely appointing his uncle to the highest level of the secular hierarchy, Æthelred instead incorporated him into the new office. Given the number of ealdormen not replaced in the first half of Æthelred's reign or who found themselves removed from office by the king for various reasons (some of them quite brutally), administering an ealdordom was not a secure form of service. By putting Ordulf in the emerging office, Æthelred may very well have been displaying his favouritism towards his uncle as well as indicating the future of royal offices in general.

Of course Æthelred could have used the new office as a way to place favourites in a position of authority until an ealdordom became vacant. He could also have employed the appointment to test their prowess in office and their loyalty in carrying out the king's

¹⁶⁴ Molyneaux, *Formation*, p. 184.

¹⁶⁵ Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LXII.

orders. Therefore, Æthelred may have tried to do one of two things. First, reduce the general number of ealdordoms by placing reeves across the kingdom and increasing his own power by having more royal agents depend on him. Or secondly, he was using the reeve position to promote and test men who had come to his attention. Yet another factor should be considered: Æthelred's children. When they are included in an analysis of the decreasing ealdormen appointments a third possibility emerges. Æthelred had six recorded sons (Æthelstan, Ecgberht, Edmund, Eadred, Eadwig, and Edgar) with his first wife.¹⁶⁶ All still lived when the king married Emma of Normandy and had two more sons, Edward and Alfred. Æthelstan, Ecgberht, Edmund and Eadwig seem to have all lived into their mid to late teens or twenties. Æthelstan appears to have been considered his father's presumptive heir but Emma seems to have demanded her children become Æthelred's heirs.¹⁶⁷ What is important for this discussion, is if Æthelred did intend for Emma's first son, Edward, to inherit the throne, the question which begs asking is what were his plans for the sons of his first marriage? Even if Æthelred planned to pass the throne to one of his elder sons he must have known multiple grown or partially grown sons could be dangerous for the stability of a kingdom, particularly one under threat of severe Viking raiding.

Æthelred had personal experience, both his father's and his own elevation to the throne were contested and in both cases only two siblings involved. He had multiple sons and actually lived to a relatively old age compared to many of his immediate predecessors. Æthelred could have had no idea how long he would live.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, the strong possibility exists that the increase of aristocratic men in a new lower office and a decrease in the number of ealdormen appointments formed a strategy to place princes in

¹⁶⁶ Ecgberht disappears after 1005 from the charters and Edgar after 1008, Æthelstan died in 1014.

¹⁶⁷ F. Barlow, *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster* 2nd edn (Oxford, 1992), p. 60. For discussion of the possibility of Edward supplanting his older half-brothers see F. Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* New edn (New Haven, 1997), p. 31.

¹⁶⁸ Æthelred's own father, Edgar, died in his thirties. In fact, one must go back to Æthelstan before finding a king who lived past forty.

ealdordoms across the kingdom. Studies, including this chapter have shown that many of the most powerful ealdormen had some sort of familial connection to the royal family. Yet two of these families (Ælfhere and Æthelwine) went un-replaced during Æthelred's reign and even Æthelmær, son of Ealdorman Æthelweard, cannot always be traced as an ealdorman. Could Æthelred, with his multiple sons, have been planning a new crop of royal ealdormen who were all tied to the throne through close blood ties? Particularly in a time of social upheaval the idea that the highest secular offices would be administered by the king's close kinsmen must have held a certain appeal.

NON-ENGLISH COMPARISONS

Tenth- and eleventh-century English kings controlled the appointment of their royal agents, although, perhaps, not as absolutely as they would have liked at all times. Their system of governance shared many similarities with their Frankish and German counterparts. Contemporary non-English rulers always faced an extra obstacle in terms of exerting consistent royal control; the sheer size of West and East Francia in comparison to the Anglo-Saxon kingdom provided additional struggles for the Carolingians, Capetians, Ottonians and even Salian emperors. Conversely, English kings rarely lived to see their children as adults which on the one hand left them unable to appoint subkings as the Carolingians did and on the other hand saved them from grown children rebelling.¹⁶⁹

While Alfred and his descendants had similarities with the Ottonians and Capetians of the tenth and eleventh centuries it is really the Carolingians of the ninth and early tenth centuries that their governmental situations most resemble. During the Carolingian period closeness to the king or *Königsnähe* determined whether a man would be included when the ruler distributed *honores* (ecclesiastical and lay offices) to his

¹⁶⁹ Anglo-Saxon kings still had to deal with brothers' rebelling.

aristocracy.¹⁷⁰ Contemporary Frankish writers indicate that the king or emperor's court was filled with young men generally from high-ranking families or kin-groups who had some direct connection with the king.¹⁷¹ Something also found in Anglo-Saxon royal courts between 950 and 1066. Like the English these aristocratic families and kin-groups were not permanent fixtures of any Frankish king's court and had a tendency to change from king to king or even from the beginning of a reign to the end. New rulers stepping into their father's places were not opposed to restructuring their officials and even which kinsmen they favoured as was demonstrated by Louis the Pious more than once.¹⁷²

Similar to the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy there does appear to have been a fluidity among the 'imperial aristocracy' (*Reichsaristokratie*) under the Carolingians; indeed they were restricted but not a closed group.¹⁷³ There was some social mobility as is best known from Louis the Pious's biographer's famous complaint concerning the background of Archbishop Ebbo.¹⁷⁴ Charlemagne had freed Ebbo and later Louis the Pious installed him to the archbishopric of Reims.¹⁷⁵ Thus, men could be appointed in the Carolingian world based on merit, although the majority seem to still have had blood connections of some sort. There was also mobility. Those who held high-rank (or an *honor*) from a Carolingian

¹⁷⁰ Many have written on this concept and its impact on Frankish aristocracy. For examples see S. MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, 2003), chapters 3 and 4; R. Le Jan, 'Continuity and Change in the Tenth-Century Nobility', in *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations*, ed. A. J. Duggan (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), pp. 53-68 (pp. 56-61); K. Schmid, 'The Structure of the Nobility in the Earlier Middle Ages', in *The Medieval Nobility: Studies on the Ruling Classes of France and Germany from the Sixth to the Twelfth Centuries*, ed. T. Reuter (New York, 1978), pp. 37-60 (p. 39); S. Airlie, 'The Nearly Men: Boso of Vienne and Arnulf of Bavaria', in *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations*, ed. A. J. Duggan (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), pp. 25-42 (pp. 27-35); and J. L. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London, 1992), pp. 53-57.

¹⁷¹ Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, pp. 41-50. Nelson discusses the writings of Dhuoda, Nithard, and Archbishop Hincmar of Reims and focuses on the picture they present of Charles the Bald's court. There seems little reason to doubt, however, that earlier and later Carolingian courts looked much different.

¹⁷² Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, pp. 71-74.

¹⁷³ For arguments that membership in the imperial aristocracy was not completely restrictive see S. Airlie, 'Bonds of Power and Bonds of Association in the Court Circle of Louis the Pious', in *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious*, ed. P. Godman and R. Collins (Oxford, 1990), pp. 191-204.

¹⁷⁴ Theganus, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris* MGH SS rer. Germ. 64, 44:174: 'qui erat ex originalium servorum stirpe.' For a discussion of Ebbo and the incident see J. Martindale, 'The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: A Reappraisal', *Past & Present*, 75 (1977), 5-45.

¹⁷⁵ Archbishop Willigis of Mainz (975-1011) was also reportedly from a low-born family. Karl Leyser suggested, however, that Willigis's parents were probably nobles albeit poor ones and not *nobilissimi*. See K. Leyser, *Medieval Germany and its Neighbours, 900-1250* (London, 1982), p. 163.

king or came from the family of such an official can also be traced moving from one area to another or even from one Carolingian kingdom to another.¹⁷⁶ A change in king could mean a turnover in royal officials but so could a change in dynasty. For example many of the families who eventually controlled the principalities of Western Francia came from Austrasia the old power base of the Carolingians.¹⁷⁷ Sometimes these families were even kinsmen of the Carolingians. Therefore, while they did create contact with the localities and eventually obtain semi-autonomous rule; these families (such as the Robertian ancestors of the Capetians) were not originally from these regions. Conversely when the Ottonians became kings and later emperors in the East Frankish kingdom, the number of Saxon nobles who received *honores* markedly increased.¹⁷⁸ Thus, just as the West Saxon line used trusted men from their own power base or from Mercia, Carolingians and Ottonians promoted men from their home regions.

Some of these appointees became quite powerful and occasionally a king had to bide his time in order to remove a rebellious or untrustworthy official. For example, Charles the Bald decided in 867 to oust Gerald of Bourges from his countship but does not appear to have been able to implement it until 872.¹⁷⁹ Janet Nelson has argued persuasively that this should not necessarily be read as a sign of weakness in royal power. Instead, Gerald of Bourges may possibly be compared to Cnut's appointment and later executions of Eadric Streona. Cnut patiently waited until he could efficiently remove a 'powerful' royal official. One cannot discuss the Carolingians without addressing one of their most famous structures, the *missi dominici*. The *missi*, as royal representatives to the localities, offer the best comparison with Anglo-Saxon ealdormen, at least in some aspects of their positions. Like the West Saxon kings and their secular appointments, Carolingian rulers who made use of this governmental structure had to choose between an

¹⁷⁶ For examples see Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, pp. 199-201 and Schmid, 'Structure', p. 52.

¹⁷⁷ J. Bradbury, *The Capetians: Kings of France, 987-1328* (London, 2007), p. 51.

¹⁷⁸ Schmid, 'Structure', p. 53.

¹⁷⁹ Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, p. 212. See *The Annals of St-Bertin* ed. and trans. J. L. Nelson (Manchester, 1991) s.a.867, 868, and 872.

outsider or a man who already possessed local political power. The Carolingians appear to have continually appointed men who already held some sort of power in the locality as their representatives.¹⁸⁰ A similar pattern is found among the Anglo-Saxon kings, although they appear to have made more use of outsiders as well to be royal representatives to the localities.

This section has focused on the Carolingians in the ninth and early tenth centuries because they had more comparable governmental situations to the Anglo-Saxons of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The late Carolingians, Capetians, and Ottonians all had to deal with a changing aristocracy. Namely, the expectation and tradition that an office or *honor* was now part of a family's inheritance; in other words, the Capetian and Ottonian aristocrats were putting down roots, building castles and consolidating their grip on local regions. During the tenth century, the French principalities and the German stem-duchies start to appear. By the eleventh century many of the families that would rule these regions for some time to come had established themselves or were in process of doing so. They were beginning to take their family names from positions they now passed down the family line or the major castles (topolineages)¹⁸¹ they had built and controlled. By the end of the Anglo-Saxon period it can be argued that ealdormen may have been headed in this direction but they were several generations behind these Frankish and German political structures and of course the major interruption of both Cnut and William the Conqueror's invasions put an end to such possible Anglo-Saxon developments.

Finally, unlike the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy many high-ranking families under the Carolingians, Capetians, Ottonians, and even Salians made use of multiple sons by often placing one or more in favoured ecclesiastical communities or by trying to get them a place in the royal chaplaincy. For example, the first Salian emperor, Conrad II (r. 1027-1039) had a first cousin who received the bishopric of Würzburg in 1034 and an uncle

¹⁸⁰ J. L. Nelson, 'Dispute Settlement in Carolingian West Francia', in *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. W. Davies and P. Fouracre (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 45-64 (p. 48).

¹⁸¹ Le Jan, 'Continuity and Change', p. 58.

who served as a royal chaplain before becoming Pope Gregory V in 996. Both of these clerics bore the name Bruno. Furthermore, Conrad had two stepsons, Ernest II and Herman IV who succeed each other as Duke of Swabia after their father. Their paternal grandfather and uncles had been margraves in Austria and third uncle was Poppo, archbishop of Trier who acted as regent for the young Ernest II. Further west, throughout most of the eleventh century the bishoprics of Auxerre and Nevers were often the brothers and uncles of the viscounts of Nevers.¹⁸² The interweaving of lay and ecclesiastical positions found among the Frankish and German aristocracies and royal houses is markedly absent among our survey of late Anglo-Saxon ealdormen and again raises the question of whether English high-ranking nobles were somehow not permitted to seek ecclesiastical office while their brothers sought lay positions.

CONCLUSION

This broad overview of men who received appointment to high secular office in the tenth and eleventh centuries has demonstrated the fluidity and instability of the highest level of Anglo-Saxon aristocrats. The system does not appear to have been unstable but the positions within it and the families who chose to operate in it remained in precarious positions. As shown in the first chapter of this thesis, in Anglo-Saxon society both lay and church families appear to have always been in either a constant state of rising to or falling from power. Some more meteoric than others but no aristocratic family survived past four generations in the position of ealdorman. Many ealdormen were the only member of their family to hold such high office. While male heirs provide the possibility of establishing an aristocratic dynasty in a region, the king could still choose to not appoint anyone from a particular family. Having grown sons provided no guarantee that the next generation would obtain an ealdorship, as is demonstrated by both Æthelwine of East Anglia, an

¹⁸² C. B. Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980-1198* (Ithaca, NY, 1987), p. 84.

established high office family, and Ordgar of the Western Shires, a ‘new’ man during Edgar’s reign.¹⁸³

Family connections were important and, similar to their ecclesiastical counterparts, future ealdormen generally needed an introduction to the royal court to gain access to such appointments. Among the five great families discussed in this chapter, lineage can clearly be seen at work in certain royal appointments. Æthelstan ‘Half-King’s influence at court surely gained preferment for his younger brothers; while his power waned under Eadwig, enough remained to ensure his oldest son quickly became his successor in East Anglia in 956. Certain families’ claim to kinship with the royal family must also be taken into account in a discussion of lineage and how these royal kinsmen often formed the great ealdormen kin-groups of the tenth century.

Yet, birth did not provide the only path to an appointment and enough records survive to trace certain ealdormen’s early careers and confidently say that they somehow merited the king’s attention and received the reward of high office. The careers of Ælfric of Hampshire (982x992-1016) and Leofsig of Essex (994-exiled 1002) perhaps best illustrate this merit base concept. Both served as lower royal agents, perhaps even within the royal household, before gaining preferment to an ealdordom. Since neither of these men appears to have a connection with any other contemporary ealdormen their personal advancement cannot be because of their lineage. Ælfgar of Essex, his son-in-law Byrhtnoth, and Ordgar of the Western Shires also fall into this category of merit based preferment, although their appointments may have more to do with their personal influence at the local level (as well as having marriageable daughters in the case of both

¹⁸³ Other examples include Ælfheah (959-972) and Æthelmær (d. 982) who both held the title ealdorman of Hampshire; each had two recorded sons who appear to have survived their father. Ann Williams has suggested that one of Æthelmær’s sons may have been the Æthelweard who succeeded his father-in-law as ealdorman of the Western shires under Cnut. The theory has some merit, unfortunately it is based solely on the identification of *Igenesham*, which Æthelmær of Hampshire bequeathed to his elder son (see S 1498), with Eynsham in Oxfordshire. The same Eynsham which Æthelweard gave to his father-in-law for an abbey (see S 911). Williams herself is cautious with the suggestion and fully admits that there are other cites which could also be *Igenesham*. See Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p. 167-8 n17.

Ælfgar and Ordgar) and being able to effectively administer in their home counties rather than some sort of specific service to the king.

Other appointments, particularly with the emergence of the reeve position, may have come from a combination of lineage and merit. The primary example of this would be the sons of Ealdorman Leofwine of Mercia, Leofric and Eadwine, who both appear to act in royal capacities similar to reeves in the early parts of their careers and Leofric eventually became earl of Mercia. Earl Leofric's own son, Ælfgar, appears to have had some sort of official duties in the East Anglian area before his appointment to an earldom. This was still only one route to power as many reeves never became ealdormen and many ealdormen do not appear in any capacity that would indicate they held this type of lower office. Even those appointments which seem so strongly to demonstrate merit based reward may have some traces of lineage in their backgrounds. Particularly in the reigns of Eadwig and Æthelred, two young kings with courts dominated by a strong old guard, certain seemingly merit-based appointments of new men may in fact have been because of their lineage, or rather their lack of lineage. In other words, men like Ælfric and Leofsige were *not* related to officials in office and therefore more likely to be loyal to the king and his directives rather than any familial goals.

Finally, the brief discussion of location in this chapter provided some interesting patterns. East Anglia as a region tended to have transplanted ealdormen and earls as administrators rather than native families. An exception to this practice exists in the list of men who administered the East Saxons, quite possibly under the over-lordship of the East Anglia official, who appear to have possessed estates either in the Essex area or the greater Anglian region. This use of relocated officials proves interesting since East Anglia, unlike Northumbria, has no record of any sort of major rebellion. Given the wealth of the region and the defensive position against Viking invasions, this particular administrative area served as a very important office to the West Saxon kings and they

obviously tried to appoint royal agents loyal to themselves to this region.¹⁸⁴ This careful planning of who would administer East Anglia mirrors the conscientious consideration of ealdormen in central Wessex. As discussed above, central Wessex formed the heart of the West Saxon kings' powerbase and thus the ruler needed to trust its administrators. The pattern which emerged from the central West Saxon ealdordom was that the English kings did not follow one. From what appears in the extant records, no family ever had more than one member control this particular ealdordom until the Godwinesons. A brilliant move on the part of the tenth- and early eleventh-century kings, it enabled their heartland to be administered but did not provide any single family with the ability to form a powerbase with the lands they formed stronghold of the West Saxon line. Edward the Confessor's inability or disinclination to follow this pattern perhaps shows the inherent weakness of his reign. As a king, his ealdordoms became dominated by two families with only one outsider, Siward, holding high office.

Northumbria always proves hard to analyse but the continued presence of the House of Bamburgh in the area north of the Tees river indicates that the king's control did not extend into the northern localities as it did in Mercia, Wessex and East Anglia. The area south of the Tees did become subject to royal appointments but the actual activities of these officials in southern Northumbria remain obscure. Although Ælfhelm at least came from a northern Midlands family rather than Northumbrian and probably represents an attempt not only to have a strong defensive line against Viking incursions but also to bring Northumbria more under the direct control of the West Saxon kings. The success of any of these non-native appointments remains debatable or just unknown. Finally, Mercian royal appointments, particularly as the tenth-century progressed, appear to have been given to native aristocrats. Like the eastern and western edges of Wessex, when an ealdorman or earl's background is traceable, one often finds his familial patrimony lies

¹⁸⁴ The lack of any person with the title ealdorman or earl during certain decades may indicate that the West Saxon kings and Cnut sometimes were unsure what to do with the region. Or, because of the lack or rebellions, believed they no longer needed a strong official in the area.

close to if not within his administrative sphere. Certainly this shows a significant amount of trust was placed in the Mercian aristocracy (and Eastern and Western Wessex) but one has to wonder if in certain areas there another factor existed: it required too much time and resources to set up a transplanted official. Particularly in the Western Shires or in the northern part of Mercia, one is left wondering if the king could persuade non-native aristocrats to relocate to areas so far away from the royal court. Perhaps something similar to Dunstan's apparent refusal of to accept the bishopric of Crediton in the early 950s because of saintly piety—although I am inclined to think that as a man accustomed to the royal court he may have not wanted to be placed in such a fringe area of the kingdom. In certain areas it must have been simpler for the king to appoint a wealthy thegn from the region rather than relocate a higher aristocrat who had no powerbase.

This chapter has shown how a man could potentially gain appointment to high secular office in late Anglo-Saxon England. It demonstrates the importance of access to the royal court and thus the ability to come to the king's attention whether it occurred through lineage (or even royal kinship) or through one's own merit in the service of the king. It also reveals the instability and fluidity of being in the top echelons of secular power and the uncertainty this must have caused, even if it was unconscious, in the minds of the aristocracy. Besides the West Saxon royal line, the only traceable powerful family from the ninth through the eleventh century was the House of Bamburgh and one has to wonder if their distance from the royal court preserved their kin-group. The Anglo-Saxon kings surely used this aristocratic uncertainty to their advantage to help maintain power. The emergence, or perhaps it is better to say emerging use, of a new type of official, the reeve, may have also contributed to an insecurity among the secular elite who surely noticed that Æthelred and even Edgar were not appointing as many ealdormen as the kings before them had done. While the power of a kin-group could force a king's hand in an area and win them a high level office, the king or his successor often managed to

remove this family from power at some later date and replace him with a ‘new’ man who did not have connections to other ealdormen and earls.

Ultimately, this chapter has not only provided insights into the system of appointments and how both king and aristocracy could use it but it also has revealed something about the culture of the late Anglo-Saxon secular elite and perhaps a glimpse into how they perceived themselves as a class. The aristocracy, with very few exceptions, chose a purely secular route to political power. A path they appear to have taken their cues on from the royal family itself. A quick survey of the royal family at this time shows a similar model—no sons either by choice or through force entered the Church. Several royal daughters, however, did enter convents and some were even venerated as saints. Even when there was a surplus of æthelings as there was in the reigns of King Æthelstan and King Æthelred, none of the royal princes entered or were placed in the Church. The absence of any recorded sons becoming clerics raises the strong possibility that it was not a career option for these men. In the case of the royal family this dearth may be excused because of the lack of more than two heirs between 946 and the 990s. Despite finding various ealdormen and earls, both from the great families and the ‘new’ men, with multiple sons who survived into adulthood, this survey does reveal that the vast majority did not place a single one of their sons in the Church. Of course the possibility exists that other male children went unrecorded who did become career clerics but if this is the case very few climbed the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Chapter one has demonstrated that only two bishops (Archbishops Æthelnoth and Ælfric) out of all those appointed to Worcester, Winchester, and Canterbury c. 950-1066 may have had a close connection with an ealdorman or earl. This chapter’s survey revealed that only Ælfric of Hampshire and Leofric of Mercia appear to have had a close blood relatives in the church. Edwin, abbot of Abingdon was Ælfric’s brother while, Abbot Leofric of Peterborough was Ealdorman Leofric nephew and namesake. These men are the exceptions, not the rule. Thus if one

was part of the ealdorman class or in a position to gain such rank, a person formed part of an extremely secular level of society. The reasons for not attempting to gain power through both ecclesiastical and secular routes remain unclear but seem fairly unique to tenth- and eleventh-century England. They only sought to enter the Church permanently as a place for retirement or burial. This lack of entrance into the Church does not equal a lack of piety, given the support to the great reformed houses by these men, but rather indicates a different kind of piety. A late Anglo-Saxon noble (or even royal) male supported the Church with gifts and protected it from its enemies, including other members of the aristocracy, but they themselves did not become career clerics. It was somehow improper as a vocational choice in this particular aristocratic culture and this is reflected in the lack of men from this level of society found in the Church.

Chapter 3

Royal Assemblies and National Duties

‘In this year the king [Æthelred] and his councillors determined that tribute should be paid to the fleet and peace made with them. . . then the king sent Ealdorman Leofsige to the fleet, and he then, by the command of the king and his councillors, arranged a truce with them. . .’

ASC C, s.a. 1002

Over the past decade scholars have explored the idea of consensus among medieval kings and their councillors in the governing of medieval kingdoms.¹ This form of governance can best be seen in the extant sources that described or come directly from the royal assemblies of a realm. ‘Consensus’ or ‘consent’, like other words used casually in a democratic society, must be treated cautiously when discussing the medieval period. While these assemblies seemed to have functioned as consultative occasions between the king and his *witan*, close examination of tenth- and eleventh-centuries charters has indicated that these meetings were never as straight forward as such contemporary language would suggest.² Although our sources reveal occasions involving negotiation and agreement among participants, the majority of members of the *witan* owed their high-ranking appointments to the king. The ruler, of course, possessed the power to retaliate with royally-ordered forfeiture and banishment of an offender if challenged. Still, consent among the king and his councillors was not an illusion at the royal assemblies and the

¹ P. Barnwell and M. Mostert, *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2003), p. ix. The various essays in this book attempt to deal with the idea of consensus as well as to more properly define political assemblies in various areas and periods of the Middle Ages. More recently see L. Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871-978: Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2013), particularly chapters 1, 5, and 7; B. Schneidmüller, ‘Rule by Consensus: Forms and Concepts of Political Order in the European Middle Ages’, *Medieval History Journal*, 16 (2013), 449-71; and G. Molyneux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), chapter 3.

² C. Insley, ‘Assemblies and Charters in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, in *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages*, ed. P. S. Barnwell and M. Mostert (Turnhout, 2003), p. 50.

ruler could not rule in an absolute manner. Rather, Anglo-Saxon assemblies were a stage for both consensus and royal force, kings ‘had to persuade and seduce as well as cajole and threaten.’³ While the king could force a subject to forfeit his lands, he usually had to provide evidence, particularly if the ruler had developed a habit of seizing estates from his aristocracy. Thus, while an Anglo-Saxon ruler could use brute force, it remained better to convince his magnates that his decision was the lawful one rather than to ignore the complaints they raised.⁴

Attendance at the royal assemblies appears to have constituted the clearest national duty for royal agents.⁵ The adjective ‘national’ encompasses many nuances and connotations that belong to later periods and remains a difficult word to use in the medieval context. For the purposes of this thesis, when ‘national’ does appear it denotes activities that affected or influenced the English kingdom as a whole. Giving counsel was not their only function and it might not have even been their most important one, but it was the only activity recorded with semi-regularity. Thus, our discussion will begin with royal assemblies. Duties beyond the royal assemblies have been divided into two broad categories. First, those dealing with people outside the English kingdom, including truce- and treaty-negotiations, tribute-payments to the Vikings, the directing of national armies, and acting as ambassadors to foreign courts. Second, those dealing with the English people: taxation, justice, law-code dissemination, the witnessing of land grants or

³ Insley, ‘Assemblies and Charters’, p. 50.

⁴ P. Stafford, ‘Political Ideas in Late Tenth-Century England: Charters as Evidence’, in *Law, Laity and Solidarities: Essays in Honour of Susan Reynolds* ed. P. Stafford, J. L. Nelson, and J. Martindale (Manchester, 2001), pp. 68-72. Stafford demonstrates that Æthelred’s actions in the 980s led to major debates on the forfeiture of lands in the assemblies of the 990s. Charters from the 990s provide much more justification on land grants and forfeitures than any proceeding group of documents.

⁵ The phrase ‘national assembly’ is problematic for it may imply too close an association with later and much more democratic gatherings. Also, northern ealdormen and bishops in poorer—and usually peripheral—dioceses were usually less frequent attenders of these assemblies thus making the gatherings less national. For these reasons, I have decided to use ‘great assembly’ or ‘royal assembly’ as better descriptions of the gatherings of the Anglo-Saxon kings and their *witan*. For an example of earlier historians who sought to place too much emphasis on these assemblies as the origins of the modern democratic parliamentary system see F. Liebermann, *The National Assembly in the Anglo-Saxon Period* (New York, 1913), pp. 4-6.

forfeitures, and the witnessing or carrying out of punishments both on groups and individuals.⁶

As L.M. Larson demonstrated over a century ago in *The King's Household in England Before the Norman Conquest* and more recent research on specific rulers has reaffirmed, an early English king surrounded himself on a daily basis with many individuals who performed different functions in his courtly circle.⁷ Several of these court members appeared alongside his bishops, ealdormen, and leading thegns at the royal assemblies. Indeed, many future royal agents lived within the king's court or household at some point and attended the royal assemblies with him. Even those court members who never obtained high office could exert influence on a ruling monarch and potentially affect the career of royal agents. According to his *vita*, Dunstan lost favour with two separate kings because of the false rumours begun by other young members of the royal court.⁸

ROYAL ITINERATION

Like other European early medieval kings, Anglo-Saxon rulers did not have a permanent capital but rather moved from one location to another within their realm.⁹ The use of

⁶ The duties which deal with the English people will have obvious overlaps with some local duties.

⁷ L. M. Larson, *The King's Household in England before the Norman Conquest* (Madison, 1904), particularly chapters 4-8. For specific king's courts see M. K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (New York, 1993); Keynes, *Diplomas*; S. Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', in *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. A. Rumble (London, 1994), pp. 44-83; A. Williams, *Æthelred the Unready: The Ill-Counselled King* (London, 2003), chapter 2; P. Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford, 1997), chapters 4-7; S. Jayakumar, 'Eadwig and Edgar: Politics, Propaganda, Faction', in *Edgar, King of the English 959-975*, ed. D. Scragg (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2008), pp. 83-103; T. Oleson, *The Witenagemot in the Reign of Edward the Confessor: A Study in the Constitutional History of eleventh-century England* (London, 1955); S. Keynes, 'Regenbald the Chancellor (sic)', in *Anglo-Norman Studies, X: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1987*, ed. R. A. Brown (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1988), pp. 185-222; and S. Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven, 2011), chapter 3.

⁸ Archbishop Dunstan's difficulties at court as a young man are a prime example of this. See VSD 6.1- 6.8 and 13.6.

⁹ For the best overarching discussion of early medieval itinerant kingship see J. W. Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany, c. 936-1075* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 45-70. Bernhardt recently returned to the topic of the royal *iter* looking past 1075, see J. W. Bernhardt, 'On the Road Again': Kings, Roads and Accommodation in High Medieval Germany', in *Every Inch a King*:

‘court’ in this thesis denotes the people who surrounded the king as he travelled throughout his kingdom and does not refer to any specific building or city in late Anglo-Saxon England. The royal *iter* (journey) formed an important part of the early medieval government with the king journeying from one city to another in order to demonstrate his possession of the realm.¹⁰ This system allowed the monarch to oversee the various areas within his kingdom while also providing local magnates access to the king for practical issues such as justice. The speed of travel and length of stay in a particular place varied but the size of the English kingdom made these journeys shorter (and probably less difficult) than the Carolingian and Ottonian perambulations.¹¹

A combination of limited extant sources and the inconsistent inclusion of the dates and sites of royal assemblies in charters throughout the period, make it difficult to pinpoint the location of each stop on a royal journey. However, we can tentatively say a few things about the tenth- and eleventh-century English royal movements. Despite the expansion of the West Saxon kingdom into the east and north during the early tenth century, the kings appear rarely to have visited East Anglia or Northumbria between 950 and 1066.¹² Rather, they remained largely within the old boundaries of Wessex, visiting royal villas and making the ecclesiastical and secular leaders from distant regions come to them.¹³ Because of inconsistent diplomatic practice in royal charters, we cannot determine itineraries for any Anglo-Saxon king but we can say a few things about where they tended to stop. They seemed to favour Winchester, but most also visited Oxford or nearby Abingdon, they often chose Kingston for their coronations, visited Gloucester,

Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds, ed. L. G. Mitchell and C. P. Melville (Leiden, 2013), pp. 303-24 (pp. 314-24). Other scholars also have recently examined itinerant rulers within the scope of a variety of studies related to different aspects of medieval governance. For examples see R. Lavelle, *Royal Estates in Anglo-Saxon Wessex: Land, Politics and Family Strategies* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 48-54; Molyneux, *Formation*, pp. 48-54; Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, pp. 45-76; and R. McKitterick, 'A King on the Move: The Place of an Itinerant Court in Charlemagne's Government', in *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective*, ed. J. Duindam, T. Artan, and M. Kunt (Leiden, 2011), pp. 145-70.

¹⁰ Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship*, p. 46-47.

¹¹ Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship*, p. 47-48.

¹² They also do not appear to have travelled far into the southwest of the kingdom.

¹³ Foot, *Æthelstan*, p. 79.

Cirencester, or Chippenham, and almost all can be found in London at least once.¹⁴ Royal agents routinely joined the king at these locations and thus interacted not only with their ruler but with the various members of his court as well.

THE ROYAL ASSEMBLIES

The great or royal assemblies were gatherings of the king and his *witan* or councillors. These gatherings served a dual purpose, since from c. 850 through to the end of the period there were hardly any separate church councils. In the sources a small number of post-ninth-century meetings are discussed as ‘synods’ but these gatherings exerted little traceable influence, particularly at the national level. While the archbishop of Canterbury continued to hold a place of honour at later gatherings, the king assumed control of all major meetings.¹⁵ It appeared that ‘the whole weight of the ecclesiastical and lay nobility was brought to bear in a single assembly’.¹⁶ Therefore, at the same royal assemblies, the late Anglo-Saxon ruler and his councillors participated in any combination of ‘the discussion and settlement of disputes, the promulgation of legislation, the election of higher ecclesiastics, political, administrative and military decisions, internal intrigue, or the authorization of grants of land and privileges’.¹⁷ Sites for these gatherings varied, although they were rarely held outside the boundaries of the old West Saxon kingdom. During Æthelred’s reign, changes in diplomatic practices provide better indications of assembly locations; the meetings often took place in royal villas, or smaller towns, and boroughs, not in major urban or ecclesiastical centres.¹⁸ Surviving records provide little indication whether the king and his councillors arranged annual meetings for the same

¹⁴ D. Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 87-94. Compare the various ‘itineraries’ of Anglo-Saxon kings from Edward the Elder to Edward the Confessor.

¹⁵ C. Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650-c.850* (London, 1995), pp. 238-240.

¹⁶ J. R. Maddicott, *The Origins of the English Parliament, 924-1327* (Oxford, 2012), p. 6.

¹⁷ S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred "The Unready" (978-1016): A Study in their Use as Historical Evidence* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 129.

¹⁸ Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 35.

dates or days but Easter was a popular time to gather around the king.¹⁹ The king may have pre-scheduled dates for these gatherings but assemblies also served as the arenas for the making of important appointments, such as archbishops, as well as in response to serious and immediate issues that arose, for example, Viking raids. Thus, royal assemblies were probably organized *ad hoc* as frequently as they were scheduled in advance.

A clear picture of late Anglo-Saxon assemblies remains unobtainable, as Timothy Reuter wrote, ‘we can probably not define assemblies more closely than by saying that we are dealing with one whenever the ruler had in his presence a substantial number of people who were not permanent members of his entourage’.²⁰ This description proved applicable to many Anglo-Saxon assemblies. For senior clergymen who possibly journeyed to such important gatherings, an examination of witness lists revealed only certain bishops regularly attended. For example, the bishops of Canterbury and Winchester rarely failed to appear among the witnesses of extant charters and in most cases the prelates of York and London also attended.²¹ In general, the bishops of southern dioceses appeared more frequently in the witness lists a fact which can be attributed to a number of circumstances: most assemblies gathered at locations within the boundaries of the old West Saxon kingdom; the southern dioceses covered smaller areas thus enabling less travel to perform local duties; and the southern sees possessed greater wealth than

¹⁹ See S 549 for a meeting held in the Easter season during Eadred’s reign; ASC CDE s.a. 1020 for an assembly at Easter in Cnut’s reign; VSO, iii.11 for a gathering in Edgar’s reign.

²⁰ T. Reuter, ‘Assembly Politics in Western Europe From the Eighth to the Twelfth Century’, in *The Medieval World*, ed. P. Lineham and J. L. Nelson (London, 2001), p. 435.

²¹ York does not attest as frequently in Edmund’s reign (939-946) and does not appear in surviving charters between 951 and 953 during Eadred’s reign. Generally, the northern archbishop is in attendance but it must have been significantly more difficult for York to make it to all the royal assemblies as he must have needed to administer his diocese at some point—and usually after 972 Worcester as well. London, which frequently seems to have jockeyed with Winchester for attesting in the third position (or behind the two archbishops), is a regular attendee, until the reign of Cnut when the bishopric attests much more infrequently. Keynes, *Atlas*, compare Tables XXXVII, XLI, XLIV, XLVIII, LIV, LVIII, LIX, LXVI, and LXXII.

their midland, East Anglian, and northern neighbours.²² Two outliers of this trend were to Hereford and Worcester.²³ Thus, except for York, Hereford, and Worcester the prelates who held dioceses north of the Thames infrequently attended at royal assemblies.

This situation can best exemplified by comparing the bishops of Crediton (later Exeter) and of Elmham. Neither of these sees was consistently represented at assemblies, but the prelates of Crediton attested more often than did their East Anglian counterparts.²⁴ Based on known meeting places, the bishopric of Crediton was often in closer proximity to the royal assemblies. That Anglo-Saxon rulers met at different sites throughout the south may at least partially have served to allow poorer bishops a chance to attend the king while removing the expense of a long journey. For example, the late Anglo-Saxon kings visited Gloucestershire (often either Gloucester or Cirencester) with semi-regularity.²⁵ These sites probably provided a place to which the bishops of sees like Hereford, Worcester, and Lichfield could more easily travel. These same kings appear not to have travelled much further northeast than London which may perhaps explain the infrequency with which the East Anglian bishops attended the great assemblies. We also see that the majority of late Anglo-Saxon bishops did attest at a few royal assemblies during most kings' reigns. That the names of so many prelates appeared in at least one surviving text revealed how important these great assemblies were seen to be. It should also be remembered that not all witness lists reflected with complete accuracy all those who had been present.

²² Certain bishops of peripheral sees were more consistent attendees than their predecessors or successors, see Bishop Daniel of Cornwall during King Eadwig's reign (see Keynes, *Atlas*, Table XLVIII). While there is no way of knowing for sure, certainly some bishops had more personal wealth than others which would have enabled them to travel despite the poorness of their diocese. Also, Bishop Æthelwold and Archbishop Oswald both travelled into East Anglia to pick sites for their monasteries which probably required a certain amount of wealth not only to travel to a different region but to set up multiple new houses. See *VSO*, iv.16 and *VSÆ*, ch. 32.

²³ This was the case at least when the Worcester was held separately from York.

²⁴ East Anglia was probably a richer area than Devon but Elmham itself was a poor diocese. Particularly after the ninth-century Viking invasions East Anglia probably went sometime without a bishop and afterwards the see of Elmham had to compete with the wealthy monasteries of the Fenlands.

²⁵ Hill, *Atlas*, 87-94.

Additionally, a basic order of precedence emerges among the bishoprics, with the two archbishoprics taking precedence and generally followed by Winchester or London. After the first four places, however, the order became more unpredictable and probably dependent upon seniority. To provide a brief example, the bishops of Hereford generally did not attest above the sixth position and usually appear much further down among the episcopal witnesses. Between c. 970 and 1056, however, two apparently very long-lived prelates, Athulf and Æthelstan, each held the bishopric of Hereford for forty or more years. By the end of both their episcopal reigns they had risen to attest in the third or fourth position. Thus the archbishops and bishops appear in the surviving documentation seem to have attested in a combination of see importance and individual seniority.²⁶

The secular leaders, ealdormen and earls, attested in a much simpler pattern. Scribes always listed these high-ranking secular royal agents in order of seniority with the exception of the ealdormen in the last decade of Æthelred's reign when Eadric Streona 'leap-frogged' Leofwine to attest in the first position.²⁷ Like their ecclesiastical counterparts, the northern ealdormen, particularly those of the House of Bamburgh, infrequently appear in the witness lists.²⁸ In fact, extant charters indicate certain northern earls never attended a royal assembly and only other sources reveal their existence at all. For example, the annal in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 1016 notes the death of Godwine, ealdorman of Lindsey, at the battle of *Assandun*. This particular ealdorman appears in no other surviving source.²⁹ Ealdormen and later earls appear to have come from very well to do families; their personal wealth combined with the assets from their appointments likely made it easier for them to travel to the royal assemblies. That the northern secular leaders did not appear often, again particularly the House of Bamburgh,

²⁶ Personal influence probably also played a part in the ordering of prelates. See Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 156.

²⁷ Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 213-214 and S. Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 21-25.

²⁸ Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 158.

²⁹ See ASC C s.a. 1016. The placement of an ealdorman in the area of Lindsey during this time of heightened Viking raiding and invasions, does make sense. Not knowing when Godwine was appointed, he may have been too busy securing his ealdordom against invaders to travel south for royal assemblies.

may be because of distance and finances but it may also indicate that they were less dependent upon the king for their appointments.³⁰ In other words, the House of Bamburgh may have often held the title of ealdorman because they possessed more power and influence in the north than any other family.

Charter witness-lists reveal that bishops, ealdormen, and earls were not the only attendees of these great assemblies. Other members of the royal family as well as the king, royal household officials, chaplains and other clerics, and officials of more local importance as well as many men who only appeared under the generic term ‘thegn’ all attest in various documents. Some of these men and women formed the king’s court and while they by themselves did not constitute a royal assembly with the king, it is doubtful all of them were excluded of such gatherings when ealdormen and bishops attended their ruler. We will now turn our attention briefly to the members of the king’s court who attended assemblies.

Those charters that indicate the date and place at which grants were made enable us to place specific royal family members in the ruler’s presence at certain times; however, they do not indicate that the king’s wife and children constantly joined him in his perambulations. In the early tenth century, royal consorts’ presence in the courtly documents, if they appeared at all, remained dedicated almost exclusively to the role of *mater regis*.³¹ This is clearly seen with Eadgifu, third wife of Edward the Elder.³² Emma and Edith, the last two Anglo-Saxon queens, however, attested much more frequently and almost solely in their role as king’s wife.³³ While there was a change in the role of royal

³⁰ See above pp. 77-79 and 128-30.

³¹ I am using *mater regis* and *regina* (here I mean the king’s wife) as categories of roles in which queens were appearing in the court. While the women discussed below do often attest with these titles it is not always the case. For examples throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries see S 569, S 572, S 673, S 739, S 745, S 855, S 915, S 956, S 1391, and S 1011.

³² *PASE*, Eadgifu 4.

³³ For examples of the multiple recent studies dedicated to medieval queenship see Stafford, *Emma and Edith*, particularly part II; P. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: the King’s Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1998); W. Layher, *Queenship and Voice in Medieval Northern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2010), ; J. Parsons, *Medieval Queenship* (Stroud, 1994); J. Parsons, *Medieval Queenship* (Stroud, 1994);

consorts and an increase in the frequency with which they appeared in the royal circle, it was not a steady progression. When the king married, his new wife did not necessarily replace the *mater regis* in the courtly circle. Certain consorts were able to exert considerable influence on political events if the description of Eadgifu's effect had on the early careers of Saints Dunstan and Æthelwold can be believed.³⁴

As for his heirs, generally neither the king's brother nor sons appeared in charters before adolescence. If a young child did appear in the royal documents it was often an attempt to legitimize him over his brothers. The late tenth century saw an increase in the activities and power of the queen as wife. She suddenly emerged much more in the courtly circle and as a witness of royal assembly proceedings during Æthelred's reign. Æthelred's children also appear more frequently in royal charters during the second half of his reign.

King Eadred's will provides a brief glimpse of the composition of his household and confirmed the importance of certain household officials, namely his *discðegne* (dish-thegn), *hræglðene* (keeper of the wardrobe), and *biriele* (cupbearer).³⁵ These positions gave the household officials physical *Königsnähe* but could be a stepping stone to social and political closeness to the king as well. For example, Alfred's maternal grandfather, Oslac, reportedly was a *pincerna* (Latin for *biriele*) to King Æthelwulf.³⁶ A second ninth-century man, Sigewulf, also served as a *pincerna* but eventually became an ealdorman under Alfred.³⁷ Later, Eadwig elevated his *discðegne*, Ælfheah, to the ealdordom of Hampshire. Thus, Ælfheah (Ealdorman Ælfhere's older brother) served as a royal

Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference held at King's College London, April 1995, ed. A. Duggan (Woodbridge, 2002); and T. Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Basingstoke, 2013).

³⁴ VSD, 19 and VSÆ, ch. 11.

³⁵ See S 1515. These positions probably corresponded with the better known terms, 'seneschal', 'chamberlain', and 'butler'.

³⁶ PASE, Oslac 2 and Asser, ch. 2: 'Oslac, famosi pincernae Æthelwulfi regis'.

³⁷ PASE, Sigewulf 8. See S 348, S 350, S 362 and ASC s.a. 905.

household official and was eventually rewarded with an ealdordom in a key West Saxon area.

Most, household officials never rose to such higher positions. Edgar appointed one of his foster brothers, Æthelsige, as his *hræglthegn*.³⁸ This third son of Æthelstan ‘Half-King’ served in this position at least between 960 and 963 based on his frequent appearances in the surviving witness lists. Æthelsige never rose above the level of thegn but may have had significant political influence as the author of the *Vita Oswaldi* claimed he had the power of an ealdorman and was of ‘exceeding importance whenever he came into the king’s presence’.³⁹ Both Ælfheah and Æthelsige appear among the thegns in the witness lists (before Ælfheah became an ealdorman) and most likely other household officials also attested. The lack of identifying terms, however, makes it impossible to confidently place any other officials. This does not mean these men were not a part of the royal assemblies and intermingling with the visiting royal agents.

Royal chaplains may have attended meetings of the king’s council, even though they did not always appear in the witness-lists. Besides their spiritual duties, royal priests may have guarded the royal seal and certain documents, functions which would have brought them to the royal assemblies even if they were not listed among the witnesses.⁴⁰ Other clerics, present at court, may have operated as scribes performing administrative

³⁸This is based on the assumption that Simon Keynes has accurately identified the correct Æthelsige in these charters. See Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LVII. There were at least four Æthelsige *ministri* active during Edgar’s reign. Compare *PASE*, Æthelsige 8, Æthelsige 9, Æthelsige 10, Æthelsige 11 and Æthelsige 14 and see S 687 where all four attest the same charter. Æthelsige 9 from *PASE* appears to correspond with the man Keynes dubbed Æthelsige 2, while Æthelsige 10 parallels Æthelsige 3. Finally, there are two Æthelsiges who attest Eadwig’s charters (see S 658 where one is designated *pincerna*) but with the exception of S 659 (which has dating issues) neither appears until 958 and thus after the division of the kingdom when all of his foster brothers appear at Edgar’s court. Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LI. *PASE*, Æthelsige 6 and Æthelsige 7. It is therefore likely that Æthelsige, foster brother of Edgar, began witnessing charters in the Mercian court and after the reunification of the kingdom was occasionally joined by two men bearing the same name who had been a part of Eadwig’s court, one of whom may even have held some sort of office within Eadwig’s household.

³⁹ VSO, iii.14.

⁴⁰ Keynes, ‘Regenbald’, pp. 190-91. Keynes cites S 939 and S 1454 both of which date to Æthelred’s reign. Because so little is known about the activities of royal clerics it is uncertain whether these were new duties developed during Æthelred’s rule or merely a continuation of responsibilities from earlier kings.

work which might have also led to their presence at these gatherings.⁴¹ They may have also acted as teachers at the court school Alfred established probably teaching and forming relationships with future kings, ealdormen and bishops.⁴² Edgar raised his tutor Æthelwold to the bishopric of Winchester. Not all former Anglo-Saxon royal priests were rewarded for their service with an episcopal see, but this does not mean they were not well compensated.⁴³ Although, as a group, they did not witness charters between the reigns of Edward the Elder and Cnut this may well have resulted from a change in diplomatic practice rather than an absence of this group at royal assemblies.⁴⁴ As royal priests began to attest royal charters again during Edward the Confessor's reign it becomes easier to trace their careers and activities.⁴⁵

During the late Anglo-Saxon period, a varying number of thegns (*ministri*) appear in the witness-lists. The thegns attending the assemblies represented more variation in persons and numbers than either bishops or ealdormen ever did.⁴⁶ Some attest fairly regularly and may have been the favourites of the king in his courtly circle or his household officials.⁴⁷ Other thegns were probably only present because of the meeting's

⁴¹ This chapter is not the place to address in-depth the thorny question of whether Anglo-Saxon kings had royal chanceries made up of scribes within their courtly circle. Clerics lived at court and no doubt on occasion wrote documents for the king. Whether at times one man or a group were charged with producing royal charters I am not convinced that such an arrangement was organized enough to dramatically change the number or composition of the priests at court. For the argument in favour of at least a form of royal writing office see Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 14-153. For an overview of royal clerics in general performing such duties in the Middle Ages see J. Barrow, *The Clergy in the Medieval World: Secular Clerics, Their Families and Careers in North-Western Europe c. 800-c. 1200* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 256-57.

⁴² See Asser, ch. 75 and 76. It is uncertain if the court school continued after Alfred's reign but there is also no evidence that it did not endure in some form.

⁴³ These compensations were similar to Carolingian treatment of royal priests. See Barrow, *Clergy*, pp. 261-62; J. Fleckenstein, *Die Hofkapelle im Rahmen der ottonisch-salischen Reichskirche* (Stuttgart, 1966), pp. 114-115; and H. Zielinski, *Der Reichsepiskopat in spätottonischer und salischer Zeit, (1002-1125)* (Stuttgart, 1984), p. 104.

⁴⁴ Keynes, 'Regenbald', p. 189. Keynes is responding to L.M. Larson's suggestion that the disappearance of the royal priests from the witness lists indicated a decline in this group's importance at court. See Larson, *King's Household*, p. 139. To compare attestations see Keynes, *Atlas*, Tables XXXIV, XXXVII, XLI, XLIV, XLVIII, LV, LXI, and LXI.

⁴⁵ Compare the career paths of Archbishop Stigand and Regenbald the chancellor. For Stigand see N. L. Mitton, 'Grasing Schemer or Hostage to Fortune: The Life and Career of Stigand, Last Anglo-Saxon Bishop of Canterbury', (Unpublished Dissertation, St. Andrews, 2009), pp. 62-107. For the career of Regenbald see Keynes, 'Regenbald', pp. 195-222.

⁴⁶ Compare Keynes, *Atlas*, Tables XLVI, LI, LVII, LVIII, LXIII, LXIV, LXX, and LXXV.

⁴⁷ Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 158-161. In Æthelred's reign, the charter S 853 gives titles (all positions associated with the king's household) to several of the thegns who attest at the top of their list. These thegns

location but some of these may have held a local position, and thus local influence, including reeves (*gerefa* or *praefectus*).⁴⁸ Two other positions introduced by Cnut, housecarls and stallers, may have also attested among the thegns.⁴⁹ Simon Keynes' work on charters has revealed that scribes probably recorded all the bishops and ealdormen present at an assembly, but the number of thegns listed may have been determined by the size of the parchment used and not the true number of those attending.⁵⁰ Certain future ealdormen have been identified among the recorded thegns, sometimes in close proximity to their kinsmen. Thus many future royal agents probably witnessed the interactions of king and his councillors at the royal assemblies before they ever received their own high-ranking offices.⁵¹

Charters and law-codes provide little information concerning who debated the issues at an assembly. Certainly the leading ealdormen and bishops must have voiced opinions and concerns over the various matters which arose. For major crises, like the Viking raids and invasions, it seems safe to assume that high-ranking men from those areas most severely affected would have spoken on the issue. Possibly, the thegns also joined the discussions during the royal assemblies or they may have acted more as passive witnesses. The extent to which these meetings were representative assemblies has been

are found attesting at the top of the *ministri* lists in other charters in the 980s thus indicating, at least in Æthelred's reign, that the highest attesting thegns were part of the king's household and it is the local thegns who attest in the lower positions.

⁴⁸ PASE has fifty-five entries for 'reeve', three entries for *gerefa*, and ninety-one entries for *praefectus*. There was also a position called *heahgerefa* or high-reeve which appears to have had purely military functions. Nearly all instances of high-reeves occur in Northumbria. See Larson, *King's Household*, pp. 114-15. For the earliest emergence of reeves see HE, IV.I. and V.24 and ASC s.a. 787, 823, 837, Ine, 73 and, Alfred, 1.2, 1.3.

⁴⁹ PASE has thirty one entries for *housecarl* and sixteen entries for *staller*. See also N. J. Hooper, 'The Housecarls in England in the eleventh century', in *Anglo-Norman Warfare*, ed. S. Matthew (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1992), pp. 1-16 and K. R. Mack, 'The Stallers: Administrative Innovation in the Reign of Edward the Confessor', *Journal of Medieval History*, 12 (1986), 123-34. *Huscarl* is a Norse word and the English sources often called them *pingamenn*. See Larson, *King's Household*, pp. 153-54.

⁵⁰ Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 155 and 161. Also see S 939 which specifically mentions, after listing a number of thegns, that there were many more present which were too numerous to name.

⁵¹ Whether many future bishops witness such assemblies before their episcopal preferment remains unclear. However, there are too many connections between certain monastic bishops and their successors to not believe that at least some probably attended such gatherings in the retinues of a prelate. The lack of record for royal clerics also leaves it uncertain if some future bishops witnessed such meetings as part of the king's courtly circle.

debated for over a century by numerous scholars.⁵² Certainly, whether or not the thegns spoke at the great councils, they would have reported back to their home regions what they had witnessed, thus disseminating the decisions on the various issues raised at a particular assembly.

DUTIES CONCERNING FOREIGNERS

The clearest example of royal officials acting in their role as agent are found in annals of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which depict bishops and ealdormen in the role of the king's representative or as the executor of a decision made by the royal assemblies. These activities required the royal agents to interact with both English and foreigners. The first two duties – treaty-making and tribute-payments to the Vikings – were interrelated and frequently appeared together in the *Chronicle*. The annal for 994, for example, reports that Æthelred together with his councillors decided to offer the raiders tribute in exchange for a cessation of their activities. After the decision was reached ‘the king sent Bishop Ælfheah and Ealdorman Æthelweard for King Olaf, and hostages were given to the ships meanwhile.’⁵³ The presence of hostages indicated that the royal agents were probably negotiating a treaty with Olaf in the name of King Æthelred. The entry for the year 1002 likewise recorded that the king sent a specific *witan* member, Ealdorman Leofsige [of Essex], to arrange a truce and payment with the Vikings.⁵⁴ The annals for the years 1006

⁵² For examples W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England in its Origin and Development* 6th edn (Oxford, 1897); Liebermann, *The National Assembly in the Anglo-Saxon Period*; E. A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest of England* 3rd edn (Oxford, 1877), pp. 100-17; H. M. Chadwick, *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions* (Cambridge, 1905), pp. 362-66; F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* 3rd edn (Oxford, 2001), pp. 349-53; Oleson, *Witenagemot*; H. R. Loyn, *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England 500-1087* (London, 1984), pp. 100-6; Insley, 'Assemblies and Charters', pp. 47-59; Maddicott, *Origins*, pp. 1-56; and Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, pp. 1-26. Roach provides a wonderful overview of the historiography of this debate, see Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, pp. 1-6.

⁵³ ASC C s.a. 994: 'sende se cyning æfter Anlafe cynges Ælfheah bisceop 7 Æpelweard ealdorman, 7 man gislude þa hwile into þam scipum'.

⁵⁴ ASC CDE s.a. 1002.

and 1011 also note that the Æthelred sent to the Viking army promising tribute and provisions in exchange for the invaders ceasing their activities.⁵⁵

Although the chroniclers in their usual concise fashion did not reveal who did the negotiating, it seems probable that the king continued to send at least one of his royal agents to arrange a truce or treaty. King Æthelred also raised and paid tribute in 991 and 1012 but no other details have survived. Surely someone must have approached the Vikings in order to arrange payment.⁵⁶ The decision to use these tribute payments as a means of ceasing the Viking problem was first suggested by another councillor, Archbishop Sigeric, and was probably one of the major topics of debate in the royal assemblies throughout Æthelred's reign.⁵⁷ The archbishop's suggestion was not a new one, King Alfred himself paid tribute more than once.⁵⁸

Just as the exact details of who negotiated with and arranged for payments to the Viking raiders went unrecorded so too did the particulars of other types of negotiations. No extant text revealed the specifics concerning the process by which Edmund Ironside and Cnut made their treaty in 1016. An arrangement which divided the kingdom, much as it had been split between Eadwig and Edgar in 957. The *Chronicle* does record, however, that the *witan* of the kingdom, or at least the ones still alive after *Assandun*, advised the two young kings to negotiate peace.⁵⁹ Undoubtedly, several of these councillors on both sides participated in the negotiations. We are left wondering whether the division of the kingdom along 'traditional' lines was the easiest part of the peace talks.

Making truces were not always strictly done with non-English enemies or between two royal parties. Truces were also made between the king and one of his officials. Edward the Confessor's dealings with the Godwine family, particularly the crisis of 1051

⁵⁵ ASC CDE s.a. 1006 and 1011.

⁵⁶ ASC s.a. 991(A) and 1012 (CDE).

⁵⁷ ASC C s.a. 991 and 1006.

⁵⁸ ASC s.a. 871.

⁵⁹ ASC C s.a. 1016: 'Then after this battle King Cnut went inland with his army to Gloucestershire, where he had learnt that King Edmund was. Then Ealdorman Eadric and the councillors who were there advised that the kings should be reconciled, and they exchanged hostages.'

provides the best example of these tense relationships.⁶⁰ At least one royal agent, Bishop Stigand, played a part (possibly the main part) in the reconciliation in 1052. While many of these negotiators remained anonymous or appeared only under the general term ‘councillors’, the chroniclers named enough to indicate that the highest leaders of Anglo-Saxon society made truces and treaties both with foreigners and among themselves. The chroniclers did not provide the names of enough negotiators to know for sure but it appears that bishops may have served as envoys more often than secular leaders or perhaps had more success.

Several examples of royal officials representing their king at a foreign court survived from the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁶¹ In 929, Bishop Cenwald of Worcester escorted two of King Æthelstan’s sisters to Germany as potential brides for the future Otto I.⁶² Undoubtedly, the prelate ensured the safety of the young women while also representing the king’s interests in the marriage arrangements; he probably arranged for the second sister to marry a Burgundian noble. Additionally, Cenwald forged connections with several German monasteries on the trip and may have convinced certain German clerics to travel to England.⁶³ Almost a century later, in 1013, Æthelred sent Emma and her sons to Normandy for their own safety. Abbot Ælfsige of Peterborough accompanied the queen while Bishop Ælfhun was sent by the king ‘across the sea with the æthelings Edward and Alfred that he should take care of them’.⁶⁴ As in 929, senior clergymen accompanied members of the royal family to a foreign court as guardians. They likely also represented the king’s interests at his brother-in-law’s court in Æthelred’s absence.

⁶⁰ ASC CD s.a. 1051 and 1052.

⁶¹ Because I am focusing on the period after England became a single kingdom by ‘foreign’ I mean a non-English court.

⁶² Foot, *Æthelstan*, pp. 101-102.

⁶³ Foot, *Æthelstan*, p. 108.

⁶⁴ ASC D s.a. 1013: ‘7 se cyning sende Ælfhun bisceop mid þam æpelingum Eadweard 7 Ælfrede ofer sæ, þæt he hi bewitan sceolde.’

A final recorded example occurred in 1054 when Bishop Ealdred of Worcester travelled to Cologne.⁶⁵ As Edward the Confessor had produced no heir of his own, the prelate journeyed to Germany to negotiate the return of Edward the Exile, the son of King Edmund Ironside. The exiled ætheling would provide the desired heir for the aging king. In the late Anglo-Saxon period on three separate occasions senior clergymen performed very important functions for the ruler: the safeguarding and negotiating of two princesses' marriages to foreign rulers; the protection of the two æthelings in Normandy; and the provision of a much needed royal heir living in foreign land.⁶⁶ That we do not find recorded examples of lay leaders performing such functions does not necessarily mean the king did not call upon ealdormen to do so. Still, it may have been easier for bishops to leave their dioceses for an extended period or perhaps they trusted their fellow prelates to perform their local duties in their absence. For example, when Bishop Ealdred was in Cologne he 'permitted Bishop Leofwine [Lichfield] to consecrate the monastic church of Evesham' in his place.⁶⁷ Ealdred, therefore, passed one of his important episcopal duties to a fellow bishop because he was 'on the king's business' (*þaes kynges ærende*) and representing Edward at a foreign court.⁶⁸

Royal agents did not only deal with non-English peoples when they went about the king's business. As the kingdom expanded in the tenth century, the West Saxon line had to depend more on their officials to perform the following functions. These duties would have helped create a system of governance and at least some standardization across the kingdom as well as extending royal authority, often probably only intermittently and inconsistently, to the localities.

⁶⁵ ASC D s.a. 1054: 'In the course of this same year Bishop Aldred went overseas to Cologne on the king's business[*þaes kynges ærende*], and there was received with great honour by the emperor, and he stayed there for nearly a year, and the bishop of Cologne and the emperor both gave him entertainment.'

⁶⁶ Anglo-Saxon kings sent representatives to the Continent several other times. In 1049, Edward the Confessor sent Bishop Hereman and Bishop Ealdred to Rome on 'the king's business' (see ASC C s.a. 1049). The same king sent high-ranking clerics to the great Church Synod at Rheims in 1050. See ASC D s.a. 1050.

⁶⁷ ASC D s.a. 1054: '7 he lofode Leofwine biscope to halgianne þæt mynster æt Eofeshamme'.

⁶⁸ ASC D s.a. 1054.

DUTIES CONCERNING THE ENGLISH

Many of these functions will also be discussed in the next chapter as they involved activities on both the kingdom-wide and local level.⁶⁹ The first duty and the least documented comprised the taxation of the kingdom. Documents concerned with taxation for areas larger than estates or shires did not survive in large number. Only the early tenth-century Burghal Hidage and the Domesday Book have survived as the major sources of taxation on a kingdom-wide basis. Within these two texts, how officials physically collected taxes went unsaid although other sources have revealed that as the Anglo-Saxon period progressed reeves may have gathered many of the taxes on the local level.⁷⁰ We are left to ponder to what extent, if any, did ealdormen and bishops become involved in the collection of taxes.

Unfortunately this is not an easy question to answer, particularly for systematic taxation. For extraordinary taxes, like those levied to raise tribute for the Vikings, however, the *Chronicle* has provided some insights. The annals for the years 991, 994, 1002, 1006, 1011, and 1012 all revealed that Æthelred with his *witan* determined to pay tribute to the invaders. Considering Byrhtnoth's stand at Maldon and later chroniclers' comments we can safely assume that not all his royal agents necessarily agreed with the decision.⁷¹ Besides its description of the levying of these extraordinary taxes, the annal for the year 1012 also indicated that high-ranking royal agents may have had an official function in the process. It records, 'in this year Ealdorman Eadric and all the chief councillors of England, ecclesiastical and lay, came to London before Easter...they stayed there until the tribute, namely 48,000 pounds was all paid after Easter.'⁷² These

⁶⁹ For many of these duties the activities at the local level are better documented thus making the discussions in the following chapter more detailed.

⁷⁰ III Eg 3.1, Letter of Cnut (1027), and II Cn 69.1.

⁷¹ For examples see GR, ii. 177.3 and JW s.a. 999.

⁷² ASC,C s.a. 1012: 'Her on þissum geare com Eadric ealdorman 7 ealle þa yldestan witan, gehadode 7 læwede, Angelcynnes to Lundenbyrig toforan þam Eastron. . . 7 hi ðær þa swa lange wæron oþ þæt gafol eal gelæst wæs ofer ða Eastron; þæt wæs ehta 7 feowertig þusend punda.'

chief councillors probably gathered to ensure that the tribute was paid in full (as well as congregating at one of their annual assemblies). We should consider if not assume that the royal agents helped to circulate the call for tribute. When the councillors remained in London until the tribute was paid they may have been doing one of two things: ensuring that the tribute from their region arrived safely or personally overseeing the transport of their area's portion—distance thus delaying some men more than others. Either possibility would explain the chronicler's notation that these leading men stayed until all the money had arrived. Beyond these speculative guesses, however, surviving documents have revealed no more on the extent of the role of the kingdom's leading men in taxation.

Although no more can be said about royal agents' exact relationship to the collection and levying of taxes, extant sources have created a fuzzy but useful picture of their association to law-making. From those surviving law-codes with prologues, we learn at least some of the royal councillors advised the king on the construction of the new code and were present at an assembly when he issued it.⁷³ In addition to the oral debates, one particular councillor, Archbishop Wulfstan II of York, wrote several of Æthelred's and Cnut's codes.⁷⁴ It remains less clear if earlier or later prelates contributed as substantially to the assembling of royal law-codes.

Because of the nature of the surviving sources Æthelstan's rule (924-939) has emerged as one of the best documented reigns in terms of law-making. Several extant documents and fragments issued throughout his reign have revealed both continuity in the legal aspects, which Æthelstan wanted emphasized, as well as changes or even reversals in at least two different laws.⁷⁵ These modifications highlight the probability that oral discussions took place at various council meetings resulting in these legal alterations. The first reversal of law involved trading goods on a Sunday. Æthelstan's Grately code

⁷³ For examples see *EHD*, nos 36, 37, 38, 41, 43, 44, 46, 47, and 50.

⁷⁴ P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 330-366.

⁷⁵ For the legal aspects Æthelstan focused on, see Foot, *Æthelstan*, pp. 144-5.

banned Sunday trading but when the king met with his councillors at Exeter at a point later in his reign he revoked the ban.⁷⁶ Another law that the king and his councillors later reversed pertained to the age requirement for the punishment for thievery. Again, the Grately code proclaimed that any thief over twelve would not be spared.⁷⁷ The later ordinance of London (VI As), however, revealed a reversal of opinion among the king and his councillors. After the king had held an assembly at Whittlebury he sent Bishop Theodred [London] to the archbishop to inform him ‘that it seemed to him and to those with whom he had discussed it, that no man younger than fifteen should be killed unless he tried to defend himself or fled, and would not surrender.’⁷⁸ A few important aspects of late Anglo-Saxon law-making come to light in this law-code. First, the king and his councillors changed their opinion on the age requirement for punishment just as they reconsidered the ban on Sunday trading. They may have discovered the limit of twelve years of age unenforceable, as they seem to have with the Sunday trading, or perhaps had found it too cruel to legislate. Second, one way in which dissemination could work or at least how this particular law modification circulated. The king informed the archbishop of the decision after the meeting at Whittlebury through a royal agent who had attended. Apparently, the archbishop needed to know immediately of a change to a law he had obligations, as a royal agent, to implement. It seemed that the royal agents helped in disseminating new law-codes or at least significant laws which received alternations or even a reversal.

The fourth law-code issued by King Edgar also supported the idea that royal agents not only met and counselled the king but possibly helped afterwards to circulate new law-codes. King Edgar issued this particular law-code during the early 960s at

⁷⁶ See II As, 24.1 (Grately) and IV As, 2 (Exeter).

⁷⁷ II As, 1.

⁷⁸ VI As, 12.1. For Theodred see *PASE*, Theodred 3.

‘Wihthordestan’.⁷⁹ The final few paragraphs provided instruction on how Edgar intended this code to be spread throughout his kingdom. It may also give us an insight into how kings arranged the announcement of others laws throughout the realm. *IV Edgar* concludes:

Now Earl Oslac [Northumbria] and all the host who dwell in his aldormanry are to give their support that this may be enforced, for the praise of God and the benefit of the souls of all of us and the security of all people.
And many documents are to be written concerning this, and sent both to Ealdorman Ælfhere [Mercia] and Ealdorman Æthelwine [East Anglia], and they are to send them in all directions, that this measure may be known to both the poor and the rich.⁸⁰

The document only named three ealdormen, although other surviving records revealed the existence of several more such officials. When we view the English kingdom as a whole during the 960s, Edgar’s use of these particular ealdormen becomes clearer. They covered three of the four major areas of the kingdom: Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia. The region of Wessex went unmentioned but this area was probably the easiest in which to disseminate law-codes. Furthermore, most of the important late Anglo-Saxon writing centres had locations in the greater West Saxon region, namely Winchester and Canterbury. These scribes may well have created the number of copies needed and sent the documents directly to local West Saxon centres to be distributed from there rather than through the ealdormen of Wessex. Unfortunately, if English kings put other law-codes into the hands of ealdormen or bishops to be disseminated throughout their own regions no further traces were left in the extant documentation.

Besides law-codes themselves, other documents can occasionally provide information on the legal system in late Anglo-Saxon England. The early tenth-century Fonthill letter gives a unique insight into the judicial practices of the Anglo-Saxons. The document itself has been studied extensively and reveals some fascinating details on local

⁷⁹ The location of ‘Witbordestan’ has not been identified.

⁸⁰ *IV Eg*, 15 and 15.1.

justice.⁸¹ The letter, however, also indicates the process by which an issue being enacted on the local level could affect the kingdom as a whole, or at least its leaders, the recovery of leased estates. This particular issue did not appear in the law-codes until Cnut's reign but probably became a concern to the king and his councillors before the eleventh century.

At one point in the Fonthill letter's narrative, a cattle thief's goods were confiscated by the local reeve because the thief was 'the king's man' (*cinges mon*).⁸² The local ealdorman, Ordlaif, took an interest in the case not only because the thief, a man named Helmstan, was his godson but more importantly for our immediate discussion, Helmstan held an estate at Fonthill on lease or loan (*lænland*) from Ordlaif.⁸³ When the reeve seized Helmstan's lands and goods, he also confiscated the estate Helmstan held from Ordlaif. The ealdorman eventually recovered the estate but all lands Helmstan owned (bookland or *bocland*) reverted to the king.⁸⁴ As the tenth-century progressed the practice of leasing estates to other persons increased as did the use of forfeiture to punish crimes.⁸⁵ Thus, worry over recovering one's leased estates when the leasee committed and was convicted of a crime must have also increased. Eventually, *II Cnut* established that if a man was convicted of desertion his land and life were forfeit and his lord 'is to succeed to the possessions and to the land which he previously gave him. And if he has bookland, that is to pass into the king's possession.'⁸⁶ No records indicate whether this law actually

⁸¹ This document has been studied from many angles. See M. Boynton and S. Reynolds, 'The author of the Fonthill letter', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 25 (1996), 91-95; N. P. Brooks, 'The Fonthill Letter, Ealdorman Ordlaif and Anglo-Saxon Law in Practice', in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. B. Stephen, et al. (Farnham, 2009), pp. 301-17; M. Gretsch, 'The language of the "Fonthill Letter"', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 23 (1994), 57-102; C. Hough, 'Cattle-tracking in the Fonthill letter', *English Historical Review*, 115 (2000), 864-92; S. Keynes, 'The Fonthill Letter', in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Korhammer (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 53-97; and S. T. Smith, 'Of Kings and Cattle Thieves: the Rhetorical Work of the Fonthill Letter', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 106 (2007), 447-67.

⁸² Keynes, 'Fonthill Letter', p. 80.

⁸³ Keynes, 'Fonthill Letter', pp. 75-77.

⁸⁴ Keynes, 'Fonthill Letter', pp. 85 and 89.

⁸⁵ Keynes, 'Fonthill Letter', pp. 85-86 and P. Wormald, 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 17 (1988), 247-81 (pp. 261-63 and 279).

⁸⁶ *II Cn*, 77 and 77.1.

eased the recovery of *lænland* from forfeiture. Certainly, however, the Fonthill letter preserved a window into a growing concern for the kingdom's leading men over the proper process of regaining loanland without coming into conflict with the crown. While the convoluted history of the Fonthill estate would have affected the local area more than the kingdom as a whole, the necessity of Ordlafe to exert himself (even if only a small amount) in order to recover his land must have been of interest to his fellow magnates. Undoubtedly, they or their successors would face a similar situation in their own regions as royally sanctioned forfeiture increased in usage. No surviving documents indicate such a thing occurred but the question of the proper process to recover *lænland* may well have been discussed in the great assemblies much earlier than Cnut's reign. Indeed, most surviving examples of law-code changes and dissemination were written in terms of something the king decided. The recovery of a leased estate in a criminal forfeiture may be an example of the concerns of the aristocracy being forced upon the ruler. In other words, the king's wishes to use forfeiture to claim a criminal's *bocland* could conflict with the claims of the leasor of an estate. This conflict probably initiated an unrecorded debate in the various levels of the kingdom's administration before appearing in Cnut's law-code and then being distributed back down to the local reeves for implementation. As shown in the Fonthill letter, by the early tenth century, the office of reeve had enough local power to confiscate lands in the name of the king's justice.

Royal agents of the late Anglo-Saxon period may have debated laws among themselves and the king at the royal assemblies. It does not seem unreasonable to think that while they might not always have been involved in the application of the laws at the local level the ruler may have entrusted his royal agents with bringing law-codes back home with them. Especially if the law-code may have affected the magnates in a personal way, like clearer instructions on *lænland* in the case of forfeiture, they may have felt not only obligated but eager to dispense the newer laws.

Besides helping in the dissemination of law-codes, royal agents appear to have performed other functions of a legal nature. The clearest of these duties emerged as the witnessing at the royal assemblies of land grants or forfeitures.⁸⁷ The Fonthill letter demonstrated that lower level royal officials could oversee issues at the local level, as when the reeve confiscated Helmstan's lands. If a case involving forfeiture or land grants came before the king and a royal assembly the local ealdorman or bishop quite possibly reported it back at home. Indeed, this may have been one of his major duties to ensure the extension of royal control into the locality. A king's sanctioned forfeiture or acknowledgment of a land grant meant nothing to a local people if they did not know about the decision.

The second legal responsibility involved the punishment of individuals and groups. Again, at the local level the reeve probably supervised punishment of less important men and smaller crimes. But for serious crimes or high-ranking individuals the king appears to have used his major officials. For the punishment of eminent men, particularly ealdormen, banishment from the kingdom appears to have been the most common, although the kings also employed maiming and execution.⁸⁸ Bishops, however, generally earned banishment from court but not removal from office. The *Chronicle* generally noted the majority of outlawed high-ranking officials for their banishment but only rarely revealed their crimes. The annal for the year 1051, however, went into more detail in its description of Harold Godwinson's flight from the country after Edward the Confessor declared his whole family outlaws. After noting the banishment, the chronicler wrote: 'And the king sent Bishop Aldred from London with a force, and they were to intercept him [Harold] before he got on board, but they could not—or would not.'⁸⁹ This incident may not have been unusual; rather it may reveal that other outlawed magnates

⁸⁷ For examples see S 1377 (forfeiture), S 687 (lands returned after forfeiture), and S 964 (land grant).

⁸⁸ For banishment see ASC C s.a. 1002, 1020, 1021, 1046, 1051, and 1055 and for maiming or execution see ASC CDE s.a. 993 and 1006.

⁸⁹ ASC D s.a. 1051.

were chased or escorted out of the kingdom by their social equals. Royal agents also at times acted as instruments of royal anger against a specific group, often members of a town. As these particular instances involved the use of armed force they will be discussed alongside other occasions which required militant action in the final chapter of this thesis.

Finally, involvement in judicial proceedings appears to have been a third duty at the national level for the high-ranking officials. While law-codes can indicate who the king desired to hear cases at the local level no extant code revealed who heard cases brought to the king. Here we must also turn to other sources. Again, the Fonthill letter can shed some light on this particular issue. The author of the letter, Ealdorman Ordlafe, reported that King Alfred had appointed him along with a group of other men, mostly high-level thegns, to have a preliminary hearing of Helmstan's first theft.⁹⁰ Alfred appeared to have had little to do with the actual case even though it was brought directly to him.⁹¹ Helmstan, may have been a well-off but local thegn and thus not merited the attention of the king or the majority of royal agents.⁹² In the case of Helmstan and many other recorded cases the legal system appears to have worked but there were instances when king's justice was not or could not be implemented. Æthelred, infamously, could not make the prominent Kentishman, Wulfbald, appear before him and his royal agents to answer for seizing his stepmother's goods and his kinsman's estate.⁹³ Even though a gathering of the king's councillors declared Wulfbald's lands forfeit to the king, he still refused to leave his estates and the situation was not resolved until after Wulfbald's death.⁹⁴ Keynes has argued convincingly that this particular case does not necessarily represent a flaw in Æthelred's regime but a weakness inherent in the English legal

⁹⁰ Keynes, 'Fonthill Letter', pp. 68-9. One of the men was identified as the current keeper of the wardrobe (*hrælðen*) by the author and Simon Keynes has been able to connect some of the other named individuals with thegns found in contemporary witness lists.

⁹¹ Keynes, 'Fonthill Letter', p. 66.

⁹² Keynes, 'Fonthill Letter', pp. 82-83. Keynes makes a well-reasoned argument for the possibility that Helmstan was a man of considerable local importance.

⁹³ See S 877.

⁹⁴ See S 877. Wulfbald's son and widow also caused considerable trouble after his death.

system.⁹⁵ Despite repeated summons from the king and a judgement handed down from the *witan* there is no record of an armed force going to Wulfbald's estate to remove him. That Wulfbald's widow was able to kill her husband's cousin along with his fifteen companions demonstrates that this couple probably had a significant number of warriors commended to them and this may have made regional and national officials hesitant to use violence. Conversely, perhaps they had sent armed men and the expedition had been unsuccessful in ousting Wulfbald. Either possibility reveals that a legal system based on the use of violence can only be successful if the enforcers continually have the larger force.

High-ranking officials could also find themselves being judged by the king and their fellow royal agents. For example, during the reversal of Earl Godwine's banishment in 1052 a royal assembly seems to have gathered outside London to hear the case, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* notes: 'then Earl Godwine expounded his case, and cleared himself before King Edward, his liege lord, and before all his countrymen, declaring that he was guiltless of the charges brought against him, and against Harold his son and all his children.'⁹⁶ Godwine evidently defended himself before the king and his fellow officials. His rank and accused crime, treason, were much greater than those of Helmstan. Unfortunately, the extant sources did not report if the king allowed other outlawed ealdormen and earls, such as Leofsige (murder) and Ælfgar (treason) to defend themselves before or even after their banishment.⁹⁷ Treason, by its nature, especially by a high-ranking official would have affected the whole kingdom and by necessity have required the attention of the king and his agents. Undoubtedly, even if the king sent royal

⁹⁵ S. Keynes, 'Crime and Punishment in the Reign of King Æthelred the Unready', in *People and Places in Northern Europe, 500-1600: Essays in Honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer*, ed. N. Lund, P. H. Sawyer, and I. N. Wood (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 67-81 (p. 80).

⁹⁶ ASC E, s.a. 1052.

⁹⁷ ASC C s.a. 1002 and 1055.

messengers, the chief men would also report the outcomes of the major judicial cases they may have heard while attending royal assemblies.

CONCLUSION

The duties of the major royal agents at the national level can be startlingly clear but more often than not remain frustratingly vague. Small pieces of information can be gleaned from a variety of sources but we are still often left with an incomplete picture of what actually happened. While this is challenging it should not stop us from studying and hypothesizing what these duties were and how they were performed. The kingdom's leading men did attend the royal assemblies, most with what can be termed 'semi-regularity'. At these gatherings they interacted with each other, members of the king's court, and local leaders (based on the location of the meeting); issues which concerned foreigners and those living within the English kingdom were debated and decisions made. How much 'consensus' was actually reached between the king and his councillors is unknown, but evidence from Æthelred's reign does show that the ruler could not continually run roughshod over his advisors without serious rumblings.

The chief councillors aided the king in gathering and fighting against invaders as well as arranging truces and treaties with them. They would, at times, travel to foreign courts as the ruler's representative, often in a protective role for a member of the royal family. These royal agents would also represent the king to their own countrymen in a variety of settings including quite possibly the disseminating new law codes in their region. These men held powerful offices but, as demonstrated by the number of maimings, executions, and banishments, they were also in precarious positions and could find a king's anger turned against them.

These activities were the royal agents' duties at the national level. While some involved the people living within the kingdom just as many were focused on those who

did not. These functions also often required travelling outside one's region of influence in order to be completed. The following chapter will discuss the counterbalance to these national responsibilities, the functions which royal agents performed within their particular spheres of influence.

Chapter 4

Duties on the Local Level and Units of Administration

. . . many of the best king's thegns who were in the land died in those three years. Of those, one was Swithwulf, bishop of Rochester, and Ceolmund, ealdorman of Kent, and Brihtwulf, ealdorman of Essex, and Ealhheard, bishop of Dorchester, and Eadwulf, a king's thegn in Sussex, and Beornwulf, the town-reeve of Winchester, and Ecgwulf, the king's marshal, and many besides them, though I have named the most distinguished.

ASC s.a. 896 (897 C)

The expanded Anglo-Saxon kingdom of the tenth and eleventh century would have demanded a more sophisticated administrative system in order to operate even semi-efficiently. Undoubtedly more than one type of agent existed working on the king's behalf at the regional level but, because of the vagueness or even silence of the sources we can only examine the chief ranks of these agents: ealdormen and bishops. Where possible, this chapter also explores the next highest official, the reeve. A speech attributed to Ealdorman Æthelwine of East Anglia (d. 992) by the twelfth-century *Liber Benefactorium* of Ramsey Abbey sheds some light on these agents' assigned responsibilities. Æthelwine reportedly complained:

'I am frequently worn out by the troublesome vexation of royal service, military expeditions, distributing military pay, judging pleas, conducting cases against the guilty and other public affairs—matters which are difficult if not impossible to decline without offence.'¹

This chapter will explore whether this was a plausible complaint put into the mouth of Ealdorman Æthelwine and whether bishops and reeves would have also had cause to

¹ *Chron. Rames.* I.47: 'frequenter me seu angarium regalium, seu exercitationem bellicarum, seu distribuendorum militibus stipendiorum, seu causarum judicialium, seu exercendae in reos animadversionis, seu aliorum quorumlibet negotiorum foresium, in quibus difficile, vel numquam, potest offense delinari, importuna vexatio defatigat'.

claim exhaustion as a result of similar duties. In the case of bishops, the list provided by the ealdorman was in addition to their ecclesiastical responsibilities.

Although certain church documents addressed bishops' episcopal obligations, no text has survived which explored and listed the duties of the secular officers. Thus, a variety of sources must be used to create as full a picture as possible of what ealdormen, reeves, and even bishops did when acting as royal agents in their home regions. Each type of surviving evidence offers its own individual problems for this particular topic. Texts such as law-codes and writs, originated from the king and arguably provided an idealized version of what he wanted to occur at the shire, hundredal, and even urban level rather than offering a clear window on historical events. Ecclesiastical texts, particularly the *vitae* of the contemporary saints, Bishop Æthelwold and Archbishops Dunstan and Oswald, emphasised miracle stories and the patronage of reformed monasteries but offered only glimpses of the bishops' activities as royal agents. Frustratingly, this lack of detail often extended to their ecclesiastical responsibilities as well; these texts thus provide little concrete evidence as to the nature of Anglo-Saxon prelates' duties, both religious and secular activities, or how they performed them. Other church sources such as conciliar canons and the varied writings of Archbishop Wulfstan II of York and Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham do offer information on both episcopal obligations and prelates' anxieties over performing them. The archbishop in particular makes for a fascinating study. His writings range from admonitions to his fellow prelates to law-codes and arguments exchanged with Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham concerning how to interpret particular ecclesiastical canons. Similar to texts issued by the king, saints' *vitae*, canons, and Wulfstan's writings may represent idealized visions rather than historical practice. Finally, narrative sources like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* can provide a general idea of royal agents' local duties and activities yet they predominantly focused on the martial and political aspects of their lives. Thus, administrative duties often received only vaguely

mention and seem non-existent. Some scholars have maintained that ealdormen were little more than military leaders.²

Despite the paucity of detail in individual sources, there seems to be some substance to Æthelwine's complaint; to assume royal agents, particularly ealdormen, had few or no administrative duties does not make full use of the surviving texts. Close examination of the texts does reveal that at least some aspects of the 'ideal' whether, royal or ecclesiastical, were performed. Furthermore, the Anglo-Saxon kingdom in the tenth and eleventh centuries appears too well run to support the theory that the many of the secular members of the king's *witan* only had military obligations. The survival of the English kingdom under young or even underage kings like Edgar and his son Æthelred demonstrate that not only did royal agents have an interest in the realm's continuation but that administration continued even in the face of uncertainty. However, caution must be used in constantly seeing the seeming sophistication of the realm, as James Campbell has so often done, as proving that the Old English kingdom was a well-oiled machine.³ This chapter will attempt to determine the local duties of the royal agents as well as to distinguish between the idealized duties and those actually executed.

² See F. Pollock and F. W. Maitland, *The History of English Law before the Time of Edward I* 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1952), p. 533: '[the earl] even before the beginning of legal memory he has, we may say, nothing to do with the county, save to be girt with its sword and to receive a third of its pleas, 'the third penny of the county''.

³ See J. Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), particularly chapter 1. Campbell's use of the word 'state' in reference to the Late Anglo-Saxon kingdom is indicative of his views. 'State' has too many modern connotations of unity and uniformity. While I think the Anglo-Saxon kingdom had more unity and even uniformity than many of its contemporaries, the apparent ease with which it was split between Eadwig and Edgar in 957 and Edmund Ironside and Cnut in 1016 indicate not necessarily disunity but certainly a weakness in the union of the kingdom. In other words, there seems to be a willingness to follow regional leanings rather than have complete loyalty to the idea of one central king if the opportunity arose. In this I am not advocating a 'minimalist' approach but merely wish to point out that caution should be used when viewing the late Anglo-Saxon government. Because of the connotations stated above I have chosen for the most part to use the term 'kingdom' and only employ the word 'state' if a distinction is being made between secular and ecclesiastical issues.

SECULAR UNITS OF GOVERNANCE—SHIRES AND HUNDREDS

To better understand the regional duties of royal agents, the layout of the units of governance, both secular and ecclesiastical, will be briefly described before examining the duties which appeared at these local governmental levels. By the end of the period England appears to have had fairly standardized secular divisions of shires and hundreds. Homogenous ecclesiastical units, however, did not fully occur until well after the Conquest. Although dioceses lines existed and we can distinguish (for the most part) their shapes, the sub-divisions remained fairly complex and not uniform across England.

The exact process of shiring England is not clear, nor is it known by how long the earliest shires may predate their initial mention in written sources. The first shire mentioned by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was Hampshire in the annal for the year 757, it was the only area not taken from King Sigeberht by Cynewulf and the West Saxons.⁴ The next mention of a shire was Wiltshire, or rather the men of this area who followed their ealdorman, Weohstan, into battle against Ealdorman Æthelmund and people of the ‘province of the Hwicceans’.⁵ By the end of Alfred’s reign the *Chronicle* had also mentioned the rest of the West Saxon heartland shires namely Devon, Dorset, Somerset, and Berkshire.⁶ None of these areas appear to be based on ancient kingdoms or peoples as were Essex, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey, Sussex, and Cornwall.⁷ While these other areas eventually became shires the annals for the ninth century still referred to the East Saxons and the South Saxons only later calling them Essex and Sussex.⁸

⁴ ASC s.a. 757.

⁵ ASC s.a. 802.

⁶ ASC, s.a. 825, 840, 845, 860, and 897.

⁷ G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), p. 157.

⁸ See ASC, s.a. 825 and 839 for references to the ‘East Saxons’ and ‘South Saxons’. Compare to ASC s.a. 896, 994 (C), 1009 (C), 1011 (C), 1013 (C), 1016 (C), 1052 for ‘Essex’ and s.a. 896, 981(C), 994 (C), 999 (C), 1009 (C), 1011 (C), 1013 (C), 1038 (C, D), 1047 (C) for ‘Sussex’. The majority of records of Essex and Sussex rather than East and South Saxons occur in C and D both these editions of the *Chronicle* were created at a later date than A.

The division of Mercia into shires came after the creation of those in the West Saxon kingdom. The old Mercian kingdom shifted from *regiones* to the shires with each shire based on a town (Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire) ‘which focused the surrounding areas to the support of the central and eponymous burh; when this occurred remains a matter of fierce debate.’⁹ Scholars including Frank Stenton, C.R. Hart, and others have debated the issue, providing dates ranging from early tenth to the early eleventh centuries.¹⁰ While their formation remains unclear various midlands shires appear throughout annals for the eleventh century.¹¹ An interesting list for the year 1011 which notes the various areas harassed by the Vikings:

They had then overrun: (i) East Anglia, (ii) Essex (iii) Middlesex, (iv) Oxfordshire, (v) Cambridgeshire, (vi) Hertfordshire, (vii) Buckinghamshire, (viii) Bedfordshire, (ix) half Huntingdonshire, (x) much of Northamptonshire; and south of the Thames all Kent, Sussex, Hastings [apparently a district distinct from Sussex], Surrey, Berkshire, Hampshire, and much of Wiltshire.¹²

This list, of course, did not mean that the Midland shires existed long before their first mention in the early eleventh century. Unfortunately, no substantial proof survived as to when exactly the West Saxon kings shired the Midlands only that this happened sometime between Edward the Elder’s reign and the end of Æthelred II’s reign.¹³ As for the last shires in southern England, Lucy Marten has made an interesting case for arguing

⁹ D. Hill, "The Shiring of Mercia--again", in *Edward the Elder, 899-924*, ed. N. J. Higham and D. Hill (London, 2001), pp. 144-59 (p. 144). I am unsure what Hill means by *regiones* but the ASC s.a. 802 refers to the ‘province of the Hwiccias’ which was an ancient kingdom in the region of Worcester.

¹⁰ For various theories on the timing of the shiring of the Midlands see F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* 3rd edn (Oxford, 2001), p. 337; C. R. Hart, *The Hidation of Northamptonshire* (Leicester, 1970), pp. 12-21; M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 139-42; S. Keynes, 'Edward, King of the Anglo-Saxons', in *Edward the Elder 899-924*, ed. N. J. Higham and D. Hill (London, 2001), pp. 40-66 (p. 59); J. Campbell, 'The United Kingdom of England: The Anglo-Saxon Achievement', in *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), pp. 31-54 (p. 40); and A. Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England c.500-c1066* (London, 1999), pp. 88 and 109.

¹¹ See ASC s.a. 980 (C), 1006 (CD), 1010 (CD), 1011 (CD), 1016 (CD), and 1049 (C). Both Lantfred of Winchester in his *Translatio et Miracula S. Swithuni* and the author of the *Libellus Æthelwoldi* (LE, ii.11, ii.25, ii.34) also mention shires. See *The Cult of St Swithun*, ed. M. Lapidge and others (Oxford, 2003), ch. 7, 8, 18, and 37. For the *Libellus Æthelwoldi* see LE, ii.11, ii.25, ii.34.

¹² ASC C s.a. 1011: ‘Hi hæfdon þa ofergan .i. Eastengle 7 .ii. Eastsex 7 .iii. Middelsexe 7 .iiii. Oxenafordscire 7 .v. Grantabricscire 7 .vi. Heortfordscire 7 .vii. Buccingahamscire 7 .viii. Bedefordscire 7 .ix. healfe Huntadunscire 7 micel \x/ on Hamtunscire 7 be suþan Temese ealle Kentingas 7 Suðsexe 7 Hæsting <as> 7 Suðrige 7 Bearrocscore 7 Hamtunscire 7 micel on Wiltunscire.’

¹³ George Molyneux provides a good overview of the various theories in chapter 4 of his book. See Molyneux, *Formation*, pp. 155-172.

that East Anglia was not divided into the separate shires of Norfolk and Suffolk until the eleventh century.¹⁴ In point of fact, the chroniclers used 'East Anglia' rather than Norfolk or Suffolk until the mid-eleventh century and the first references to reeves for those shires date also to the middle decades of the century.¹⁵

Shires were sub-divided into units called hundreds (wapentakes in certain areas of the Danelaw). From the extant sources it seems that by the end of the period hundreds formed the basic unit for assessing obligations and taxes, regular judicial meetings, pursuing lawbreakers, witnessing transactions, and organizing sureties.¹⁶ The history of the hundred system and whether its original purpose corresponded with later usage remains unknown. While this entity seems based on assessing units composed of one hundred hides apiece no definitive proof of this survived. Hundreds originally varied greatly in size and may have had connections with older divisions of land. Indeed hundredal lines may have existed before shire boundaries. For example the eight hundreds of Oundle may or may not correspond with the *provincia* of Oundle mentioned by Bede.¹⁷ As discernible from the lines of certain shires, particularly those based on ancient kingdoms, Anglo-Saxon kings had no difficulty using earlier boundaries already in place for their own administrative divisions.¹⁸

Similar to the problem of shire boundaries, is the difficulty of determining the exact date at which English shires were divided into hundreds. Only in the tenth century did strong evidence for their existence appear. The *Libellus Æthelwoldi* made several references to hundred assemblies witnessing transactions or settling disputes, the earliest probably happening before 955.¹⁹ Contemporary legislation does not prove much more illuminating. The hundred was first mentioned in II Edmund but legal documents did not

¹⁴ L. Marten, 'The Shiring of East Anglia: an Alternative Hypothesis', *Historical Research*, 81 (2008), 1-27.

¹⁵ See S 1068.

¹⁶ Molyneux, *Formation*, pp. 141-43.

¹⁷ *HE*, v.19 and C. R. Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992), pp. 141-76 (pp. 142, 148, 168).

¹⁸ Molyneux, *Formation*, pp. 146-47.

¹⁹ *LE*, ii.11, ii.11a, ii.12, ii.15, ii.16, ii.17, ii.18, ii.24, ii.25, ii.31, ii.34, ii.38, and ii.48.

use the term in a consistent manner until the reign of Edgar.²⁰ One text, however, does provide some more information on the royal expectations concerning hundred meetings; known as the Hundred Ordinance unfortunately scholars can only date the document to during or after the reign of Edmund (939-945). The Ordinance indicated that the king expected the hundred assemblies to meet every four weeks. Whether the local officials followed this royal mandate or whether the leading men of the hundreds already met on a regular basis remains unclear. As George Molyneux has pointed out, the issues dealt with by a hundredal assembly probably involved problems of a minor nature and thus were unlikely to be written down or if recorded not preserved with the same care as other documents.²¹

It has proved impossible to obtain a clear picture of the activities of royal agents at this level. Since hundred assemblies seem largely to have addressed issues of a more petty nature and ealdormen and bishops had various other duties to perform most likely these men did not attend such meetings on a regular basis. The very fact that most ealdormen and many bishops attended royal assemblies consistently and thus needed to travel between the place of meeting and their home shire, means that they probably had little time to attend the gatherings of individual hundreds in their own localities with any regularity; this must have been particularly true for ealdormen as their ealdordoms expanded to cover multiple shires. Reeves, however, may have had more time and obligation to attend such assemblies and thus represent the king's interest. Their own obvious self-interest as a local landowner may have also encouraged reeves to be present on a more consistent basis. The difference in individuals' ability or willingness to attend regular meetings may explain the more severe threats articulated against reeves in the

²⁰ II Em, 2. For the mention in later lawcodes see: II Eg [5, 7.1]; IV Eg[3.1-11]; I Atr [1.2-1.3]; III Atr [1.2, 3.1-3.3]; Cn 1018 [26.3] and II Cn [15.2, 17-17.1, 19, 20-20a, 22-22.1, 25.1, 27, 30-30.2, 31a]

²¹ Molyneux, *Formation*, p. 116.

lawcodes. In other words, reeves may have had more opportunity to abuse their positions at the local level as the local nature of their office made it easier to do so.

ECCLESIASTICAL UNITS OF GOVERNANCE—DIOCESES AND PARISHES

Ealdorman worked within ealdordoms that encompassed shires and hundreds. Prelates also operated inside these lines but in addition to the secular divisions they functioned and had responsibilities in a diocesan and ‘parochial’ system. Sometimes the secular and ecclesiastical boundaries ran along parallel lines but not always. The actual process of establishing dioceses and diocesan lines among the Anglo-Saxons has been obscured. Margaret Deansley gave a brief discussion of what Pope Gregory may have known about England before he sent St Augustine of Canterbury. Namely, London and York were the major cities in Britannia and Gregory probably intended these two settlements to serve as the metropolitan sees.²² From Bede we know that after the donation of King Æthelberht of Kent, Canterbury became the base and eventual episcopal seat of St Augustine and his group of missionaries.²³ They did eventually found a bishopric in London but the archbishopric remained at Canterbury. Likewise, Bede tells us that Paulinus eventually established another diocese at York and that Pope Gregory the Great had ordered Augustine to ordain other bishops for the English race.²⁴ Furthermore, despite his reticence on the subject, Bede did indicate that native British bishops existed in the west, particularly in the kingdom of the Hwicce.²⁵ He gives no clue, however, how the British had organized these dioceses.

²² M. Deansley, *The Pre-Conquest Church in England* (London, 1961), pp. 41-43.

²³ *HE*, i.26-7.

²⁴ *HE*, i.29 and ii.17. Both archbishoprics were founded on lands donated by the local king to the new religion. Thus the intertwining of bishoprics with royal authority can be seen from the beginning of the Augustinian mission.

²⁵ *HE*, ii.2. It is unknown if these British Christians made any attempt to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons or if they, as John Godfrey puts it, neglected their neighbours leaving the conversion to the missionaries sent by Pope Gregory the Great. See John Godfrey, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 67.

Originally dioceses throughout the pre-Viking Period, with the exception of Kent, covered large areas, encompassing all of an early Anglo-Saxon kingdom; the appointment of new bishops was not always smooth or prompt. As John Blair has noted, in the late 660s, only three consecrated bishops existed in England while contemporary kingdoms in Ireland, Frankia, and Italy had many more.²⁶ Therefore, each Christianized Anglo-Saxon kingdom did not even have its own bishop at the time. Starting in the 670s the reforming Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury increased the number of bishops to twelve throughout the kingdoms: Canterbury and Rochester for Kent, London to oversee the East Saxons, Elmham and Dommoc for the East Angles, the Mercians were overseen by Lichfield, Lindisfarne and Hexham for Bernicia, York for Deira, Lindsey for the kingdom of the same name, Worcester administered the Hwicce, and Winchester shepherded the West Saxons.²⁷ The ninth-century Viking invasions would disrupt this configuration, at least in part. In the south, the pattern would further change under Alfred's descendants but northern England would continue along very similar lines until past the Norman Conquest.

In 909, Edward the Elder, divided the two West Saxon dioceses creating five episcopal sees for Wessex. These new dioceses corresponded in many places with the shires of the same region. For example, the see of Wells served the shire of Somerset.²⁸ Edward's son and successor, Æthelstan, also established (or re-established) the seat at St Germans for Cornwall. Some scholars, like Stephen Bassett, have downplayed the

²⁶ J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon society* (Oxford, 2005), p. 75. It must be noted that prelates elsewhere and the Irish bishops in particular, developed differently from those in England. Even those bishoprics in Western Britain who appear to have survived the initial Anglo-Saxon invasion existed in a form at odds with the development of the English ones. Cultural differences can account for some of these English idiosyncrasies but scholars like Blair are at a loss to explain all of the developments, particularly the lack of local churches to serve places like small villages.

²⁷ Blair, *Church*, p. 79. It is unclear whether Hereford had yet been established for the *Magonsæte*.

²⁸ N. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (Leicester, 1984), pp. 210-13 and A. Rumble, 'Edward the Elder and the Churches of Winchester and Wessex', in *Edward the Elder, 899-924*, ed. N. J. Higham and D. Hill (London, 2001), pp. 230-47 (pp. 238-244).

correlation between West Saxon dioceses and local shires.²⁹ Comparing maps of shires and dioceses, however, it appears very unlikely that this reworking of the West Saxon sees was not at least somewhat (if not fully) intentionally drawn around shire divisions. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* seems to support this theory as it often refers to the prelates of southern England as the bishop of a specific shire. For example, the episcopal holder of Ramsbury was generally referred to as the bishop of Wiltshire.³⁰

In spite of Edward the Elder and Æthelstan's activities, the regions outside of Wessex remained, with the exception of Worcester and Hereford, divided into four or five large dioceses throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries.³¹ All these dioceses appear to have remained based on ancient kingdoms or peoples.³² This pattern explains why the prelate of Worcester was called the bishop of the Hwicce until the mid-tenth century; similarly the annal for 1043 referred to Stigand as the 'bishop of the East Angles'.³³ Finally, a bishopric of Lindsey, based on the ancient kingdom of the same name, existed but after the Viking invasion of the area in the ninth century its episcopal line became disrupted. The already large diocese of Dorchester eventually subsumed Lindsey. While the northern archbishopric remained stable, the other Mercian, East Anglian and Northumbrian dioceses saw at least one change of location to their bishop's seat without, as with their West Saxon counterparts, any accompanying reduction in size. These enormous dioceses would have required more effort to travel across and generally had

²⁹ S. Bassett, 'The Administrative Landscape of the Diocese of Worcester in the Tenth Century', in *St Oswald of Worcester: Land and Influence*, ed. N. Brooks and C. Cubitt (London, 1996), pp. 147-73 (pp. 151-55).

³⁰ For Wiltshire see ASC C s.a. 981; A s.a. 994; EF s.a. 1006; D s.a. 1046. For other examples CD s.a. 977 [Devonshire]; C s.a. 978 [Dorset]; EF s.a. 1033 [Somerset]; CD s.a. 1038 [Sussex, East Anglia]; E s.a. 1044 [Devonshire]; D s.a. 1047 [Devon, Cornwall, Worcester]; CDE s.a. 1047 [Sussex]; D s.a. 1049 [Oxfordshire].

³¹ D. Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), p. 148. Compare to the map of shires on pp. 96 and 98.

³² F. Barlow, *The English Church, 1000-1066: A History of the Later Anglo-Saxon Church* 2nd edn (London, 1979), pp. 162-3. The ancient dioceses were formed as Worcester for the Hwicce, Hereford for the *Magonsæte*, a bishopric (sometimes two) for the East Angles and one for the kingdom of Lindsey.

³³ ASC CE s.a. 1043 'bisceope to Eastenglum'.

less monetary income on which a bishop could support himself.³⁴ The lack of wealth and the larger regions to administer ecclesiastically may explain the inconsistent attendance at royal assemblies by northern bishops.³⁵ The extension of West Saxon control over the North as well as the tendency of southern leaders to ‘rescue’ the bones of local northern saints must have created dissatisfaction with the southern kings and probably also influenced these prelates to stay away.³⁶ Like ealdordoms, dioceses served as the largest units of administration within the kingdom. While they could correspond with shire boundaries they were just as likely in most regions of the English kingdom to cross these lines.

Just as shires were broken into hundreds, so dioceses also acquired sub-divisions. The ability of bishops to effectively perform either ecclesiastical or secular responsibilities at this more local level, however, has proved hard to verify. No formal parochial system existed in Anglo-Saxon England. Even when organisational patterns vaguely emerge this did not translate to a uniform pattern across the kingdom. Indeed, the early medieval English Church went through three identifiable phases of ecclesiastically partitioning at the local level. John Blair has argued convincingly that these three systems of sub-diocesan partition existed and, moreover, that they did not follow one after each

³⁴ The scale of the northern dioceses was not a new problem and had been pointed out by Bede in his letter to Archbishop Ecgberht of York in 734. Bede added that more priests and teachers needed to be ordained and even recommended the consecration of more bishops to help administer pastoral care to the northern kingdoms. See *EEE*, §9.

³⁵ As well as administering large areas, senior clergymen also had to make arrangements for the amount of time it required to attend the king at his court. This problem was not something which only developed in the tenth century. The anonymous life of Ceolfrith reports that in the seventh century, Abbot Benedict Biscop had to appoint another monk, Eosterwine, to administer his monastery during his many absences at court. See *C&S*, no. 155, ch. 12. Undoubtedly, both bishops and abbots would have had to deal with this problem in order to ensure both attendance at the royal court and proper spiritual care of those left behind in their diocese or monastery.

³⁶ Archbishop Wulfstan I of York (r. 931-956) is seen as acting as one of northern leaders who swore loyalty to King Eadred in 947. By 952, Eadred had arrested Wulfstan for most likely not remaining loyal to the West Saxon king. See *ASC* s.a. 947 and 955.

other completely erasing the proceeding structure. Instead, the systems overlapped and co-existed with one eventually prevailing.³⁷

To the early Christianized Anglo-Saxons the word *parochia* appears to have simply meant the area over which a bishop had charge or his diocese.³⁸ Interestingly, the Anglo-Saxon Church borrowed vernacular words directly from vocabulary for lordship and belonging to describe the medieval equivalent of parishes and parishioners.³⁹ These loan-words provide an insight into how the English viewed the ordained clergy and their relationships and responsibilities to the laity. They particularly demonstrate the social importance of those ordained to the priesthood as well as their obligations to care for their flock. This practice may also explain how clergymen were apparently readily accepted as royal agents.

As with diocesan boundaries, the roots of diocesan partition lay in the early English Church. The earliest division was the minsters [OE *mynster*] and their areas of authority which dominated the seventh and eighth centuries. Sarah Foot has depicted the minster as ‘the focus of all Anglo-Saxon piety: it satisfied the devotional aspirations of pious men and women, served the spiritual and often the charitable needs of its lay neighbours and fulfilled a valuable social function as a focal point in its own locality.’⁴⁰ Interchangeable with the Latin *monasterium*, the Old English term minster denoted a place where clergy of various levels lived in community, gathered around a church. These communities, far less enclosed or regulated than the modern understanding of

³⁷ Blair, *Church*, p. 491: ‘In 900 the great majority of English clergy either lived at, or were attached to, minsters. By 1000 it seems likely that significant numbers of priests were coming to be based at small manorial households and local churches. By 1100, though the minster-priests were probably still numerous, the priest of local churches may have outnumbered them substantially.’

³⁸ S. Foot, *Monastic life in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 600-900* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 294. Foot points out that it could be used to describe a network of related or connected minsters and that Asser uses the word in reference to the church of Exeter as closer to our modern understanding of the term. These instances, however, appear to be exceptions. See Blair, *Church*, p. 427 for brief comparison with European sources.

³⁹ Blair, *Church*, p. 428-433. Quite literally the local laity belonged to the priest as they might belong or come under the jurisdiction of a local secular lord.

⁴⁰ Foot, *Monastic Life*, p. 4.

‘monastery’, followed a wide-ranging number of rules.⁴¹ Not all members of a minster community necessarily interacted with the laity outside their walls, but those ordained to the diaconate or priesthood probably had some pastoral obligations for the people in the surrounding area—or at least to the populace located on the lands owned by the minster.⁴² Thus the assigned size of the area a community’s priests had to administer probably heavily correlated to extent of their individual minster’s endowment.⁴³ Indeed during this period, the assignment of the cure of souls (*cura animarum*) may have been based just as much on the fact that an individual member had received ordination then on a minster’s location.⁴⁴

The establishment of minsters occurred for a variety of reasons but rarely in order to provide pastorally for an area.⁴⁵ Whatever the motive for the foundation, a minster community will have wanted at least one priest among its members to minister to its own spiritual needs.⁴⁶ In an attempt to ensure adequate pastoral provision for his whole flock, a bishop may have insisted the community’s priest (or at least one of them if the minster possessed several men ordained to this clerical level) also provide sacraments and teaching to the local laity. Generally the leaders of a community did not perform lay ministry rather the less elevated and often nameless priests administered to the local

⁴¹ S. Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon Minsters: A Review of Terminology', in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), pp. 212-25. The exception seems to be bishops’ households which were called *sedes episcopales* or *ecclesiae*. See J. Campbell, 'The church in Anglo-Saxon towns', *Studies in Church History*, 16 (1979), 119-35.

⁴² While they did not have to go out and minister to the laity, many minster members may have taken care of the poor or sick who came to the gates of the community. See Foot, *Monastic Life*, pp. 307-311.

⁴³ Foot, *Monastic Life*, p. 137.

⁴⁴ Both Sarah Foot and Catherine Cubitt make a convincing argument that pastoral care at this point in the English Church may have been based more on people, because of their clerical level, then strictly on geographical locations. See Foot, *Monastic Life*, p. 290 and C. Cubitt, 'Pastoral Care and Conciliar Canons: The Provisions of the 747 Council of Clofesho', in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), pp. 193-211 (p. 206). It is doubtful all priests lived with the bishop so speaking of the minster system is not necessarily an incorrect way to approach this issue. Pastoral assignments such as they were must have been a combination of the locality of a priest as well as his ordination.

⁴⁵ Only one minster, Breedon-on-Hill is known to have been founded specifically for a pastoral role, see S 1803.

⁴⁶ Foot, *Monastic Life*, p. 333.

populace.⁴⁷ Although these anonymous priests belonged to minster communities, by virtue of their ordination they were also answerable to the bishop for their pastoral duties.⁴⁸ The areas for which each minster's priests and deacons held pastoral responsibility did not necessarily overlap or even line-up in a convenient interlocking pattern. Thus, large swathes of land with villages and homesteads may have remained 'unassigned' leaving the burden for their pastoral care on the bishop.

Sometime in the ninth century a second sub-diocesan division emerged, the mother-parish.⁴⁹ Over time the minster structure became much more complicated. Some of the smaller minsters disappeared while others appeared later in the ninth and tenth centuries as important head (or mother) churches of a mother-parish, 'a complex federations of sub-districts, served from one centre but stretching across large and diverse territories'.⁵⁰ Priests and deacons at mother-parishes performed spiritual duties for the laity of a large area at a central location. Like minsters, a mother-parish contained various levels of the clergy living together in community. Also similar to the minster system, the boundaries of mother-parishes probably did not overlap to cover every inch of the diocese, thus while easing the burden of pastoral care from a bishop they did not remove it entirely. Just as his son, Edward the Elder, probably drew new diocesan lines to correspond with shire boundaries in 909, King Alfred may very well have used mother-parishes as the ecclesiastical counterpart to the hundred.⁵¹ In fact, within the shires of the

⁴⁷ As Blair points out, the anonymous priests are those who emerge in the twelfth-century as vicars and chaplains. See Blair, *Church*, pp. 452-53.

⁴⁸ Foot, *Monastic Life*, p. 333. That there were perhaps not enough priests or at least not enough well trained priests to help the bishop in his diocese is indicated by the anxiety displayed by Bede in his letter to Ecgbert as well as various canons issued by early Anglo-Saxon Church councils. See C. Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650-c.850* (London, 1995), pp. 99-124 and 191-200.

⁴⁹ Blair has a very convincing argument that the three structures existed together without abrupt changeovers but sometimes he appears to be too eager to show continuity particularly in areas overrun by the Vikings in the ninth century. This includes the uninterrupted existence of major minsters in the seventh and eighth centuries emerging as mother-parishes. Blair does provide some persuasive evidence for continual surviving of some of these later mother-parishes but not all appear plausible.

⁵⁰ Blair, *Church*, p. 426.

⁵¹ Blair, *Church*, p. 433.

West Saxon heartland, mother-parish boundaries often lined up with hundredal borders.⁵² This occurred in only one other place, the north-western shires of Cheshire and Lancashire which probably resulted from the expansion activities of Æthelflæd, Alfred's daughter.⁵³ For the West Saxon line who found themselves trying to control and systematise an ever growing kingdom, having a centre for ecclesiastical activities in the form of a mother-church would have corresponded very well with the specific places at which the hundred court met.

In the late tenth century, a third type of sub-diocesan division becomes visible in both written and archaeological records, that of the local church—often founded by a lord on or near his manor—staffed by a single priest. In these situations, the aristocratic founder often selected the priest from among the local laity and many of these clerics may have had little education.⁵⁴ The founders did not always select freemen and may have expected 'their' clerics to act as a retainer by attending him at his manor and at the hundred court.⁵⁵ This type of priest even appeared at times engaged in secondary jobs including traders, merchants, and reeves.⁵⁶ Thus senior clergymen may not have been the only ones to combine clerical duties with those of a royal agent.

⁵² One example is Hurstbourne Priors (Hants.) where a church was consecrated in 902. Blair summarizes that this consecration marked the splitting of a mother-parish into two parishes which corresponded with the hundreds of Hurstbourne and Evingar found in Domesday Book. Blair further points out that Great Bedwyn (Wilts.) and Lambourn (Berks.) also appear to be mother-parishes which line up with the hundreds in the their respective shires. See Blair, *Church*, p. 301. For Hurstbourne Priors see also S 1285.

⁵³ Blair, *Church*, pp. 300 and 309.

⁵⁴ Blair, *Church*, pp. 491-92.

⁵⁵ Blair, *Church*, pp. 492-93. For an example of an unfree priest see the will of Æthelgifu (S 1497). For the most recent discussion and translation of this particular will see *Charters of St Albans*, ed. J. Crick (Oxford, 2007), p. 91.

⁵⁶ Ælfric, 'Pastoral Letter for Wulfsgie III', cc 77-82, 102-3, (C&S, nos. 212, 216, and 217) and Ælfric, 'First O.E. Letter for Wulfstan, c. 185 (C&S, no. 296). John Blair notes that these are drawn from Carolingian material and may not necessarily be contemporary comments, see Blair, *Church*, pp. 491-92 n292. While this may be the case, bishops did perform what may normally have fallen under an ealdorman's duties so I think it is possible that a priest might take on the duties or even office of a reeve. Judith Green's research on sheriffs confirms this theory as she has identified the first possible sheriff as Wulfsgie the priest, the shire-man of Kent found in S 1458. The land dispute recorded in S 1458 can only be dated 964x988 and calls Wulfsgie *preostes þæs scirigmannes*. See J. A. Green, *English Sheriffs to 1154* (London, 1990), p. 9. The existence of Wulfsgie during King Edgar's reign also points towards the trend, discussed elsewhere in this thesis, in the early part of Æthelred II's reign to make more use of sheriffs rather than replacing dead ealdormen.

Episcopal authority likely was not strong enough to exert a forceful influence in many early minster communities. In later centuries they may have experienced the same problem among the priests of local churches as well as the reformed monasteries. Yet, episcopal anxiety over pastoral care provision as well as prelates' attempts to exert their power over the minster communities appeared in Bede's letter to Ecgberht and as well as in the canons from the councils of *Clofesho* in 747 and Chelsea in 816.⁵⁷ These early sources reveal information about bishops' duties, including the fact that prelates were supposed to travel around their diocese at least once a year but that these pastorally driven journeys still did not reach all the lay members in the region. Bede wrote to Ecgberht: 'because the places in the diocese you guide are too widespread for you to be able to travel through them all and preach the word of God in every single hamlet and farmstead by yourself, even making use of the course of a whole year'.⁵⁸ Bede went on to recommend the archbishop ordain more assistants because he has heard rumours that the inhabitants of many villages and hamlets had not seen a bishop in many years.⁵⁹ This annual journey through their dioceses would have also allowed prelates to execute duties as a royal agent. It is worth pondering if bishops combined the responsibilities of pastoral care with their more secular duties and thus scheduled a journey in order that they might also attend a shire or hundred meeting.

The later clerical writers Archbishop Wulfstan and Abbot Ælfric also addressed pastoral care and a bishop's supervision of it. Some of the issues these clerics debated could be classified under the responsibilities of a royal agent as they were very similar to duties assigned to ealdormen and reeves. Scattered evidence also indicated that some bishops may have held diocesan synods to confer with their priests. Mary Frances

⁵⁷ See Cubitt, 'Pastoral Care', pp. 195-98.

⁵⁸ *EEE*, §5: 'Et quia latiora sunt spatia locorum, quae ad gubernacula tuae diocesis pertinent, quam ut solus per omnia discurrere, et in singulis uiculis atque agellis uerbum Dei praedicare, etiam anni totius emenso curriculo'.

⁵⁹ *EEE*, §5.

Giandrea has pointed out that these possible synods, much like the larger counterparts held by bishops when they attended the royal assemblies, may have occurred in conjunction with shire meetings. If this theory seems likely as it would have provided a way for bishops to gather his diocesan priests particularly when small local parishes became popular. This may have proved eminently practical if many of these local priests acted as retainers for local aristocrats and attended the shire meetings as members of their lord's retinue.⁶⁰ Thus, bishops and even abbots, throughout the Anglo-Saxon period worked within the shire, hundredal, diocesan, and sub-diocesan systems to oversee the *cura animarum* of the laity in their dioceses. They may have even combined the care of their flocks with their responsibilities as royal agents although the sources do not show this clearly. Ultimately, like the mostly unnamed priests who were the face of pastoral care to the Anglo-Saxon laity, a prelate's involvement at this level may have gone unremarked upon because at this level the elite and powerful did not have a visible presence.

THE OFFICE OF EALDORMAN

Although the late Anglo-Saxon ealdormen and earls oversaw large regions covering multiple shires, the original design for the office seems to have been for each shire to have its own ealdorman. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* provides evidence for this in its annals for the ninth century which always mentioned ealdormen only in relation to one shire. For example, the *Chronicle* records for the year 840 that Ealdorman Wulfheard with the people of Dorset fought against the Danes.⁶¹ In 845, the people of Dorset reappeared, this time under the leadership of Ealdorman Osric and Bishop Ealhstan

⁶⁰ M. F. Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 116-21.

⁶¹ ASC, s.a. 840.

fighting the Danish army alongside Ealdorman Eanwulf and the people of Somerset.⁶² Similar activities appeared in the following decades as ealdormen led the peoples of Devon, Kent, Surrey, Wiltshire, Berkshire, and Hampshire.⁶³ In each case the chronicler associated an ealdorman with the people or region of single shire.

As the West Saxon kingdom expanded over most of England, this practice likely became impractical; alternatively, the change may have occurred because the king could not find enough men he trusted. Thus necessity might have forced the kings to give ealdormen lordship over increasingly larger areas, encompassing multiple shires. The career of Ealdorman Ælfhere exemplifies how this changed worked in the mid tenth century. Appointed in 956 by King Eadwig as one of several ealdormen *in* Mercia, by the time of his death Ælfhere appears to have been the ealdorman *of* Mercia.⁶⁴ We can see the same in the political career of Earl Godwine who started out as an official in eastern Wessex, his earldom eventually stretched from Kent to Cornwall.⁶⁵ The decrease in the number of ealdormen or earls appointed by the later Anglo-Saxon kings also demonstrated how ealdordoms became enormous regions of lordship. This move raises an interesting point, mainly whether the number of ealdorman's duties rose with the increased size of ealdordoms.

Duties of Ealdormen—Royal Service

Frustratingly, whether they held office in a single shire or multiple ones, the duties that ealdormen and earls actually performed remains unclear. We can glimpse ealdormen executing several of these activities Æthelwine mentioned at the local level of

⁶² ASC s.a. 845.

⁶³ ASC, s.a. 825, 840, 845, 851, 853, 860, 896, and 897.

⁶⁴ For an overview of Ælfhere's career see A. Williams, 'Princeps Merciorum gentis: the Family, Career and Connections of Ælfhere, Ealdorman of Mercia, 956-83', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 10 (1982), 143-72 (pp. 156-60). For his effects on tenth-century politics see B. Yorke, 'Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century', in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. B. Yorke (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1988), pp. 89-118 (pp. 75-78).

⁶⁵ For the most recent scholarship on Godwine's career see F. Barlow, *The Godwins: The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty* (Harlow, 2002), pp. 37-70 and E. Mason, *The House of Godwine: The History of a Dynasty* (London, 2004), pp. 31-48.

governance. While all of the duties in the ealdorman's list can be termed 'royal services', I have chosen to interpret this part of Æthelwine's complaint as the duties involved more directly with the king: attendance of royal assemblies, treaty making, tribute payment collection, ambassadors to foreign courts and punishing offenders to name a few. As these types of responsibilities have been explored in the previous chapter we will focus our attention on the other portions of Æthelwine's complaint.

Duties of Ealdormen—Military Duties

Military functions were the most common and probably the chief duty in the origin of the office. The earliest records of ealdormen show them leading men of a single shire into battle. These military encounters involved other ealdormen with their own shire-based forces or, before the expansion of the West Saxon kingdom over all of southern England, kings of other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. This duty quickly becomes multi-faceted, particularly when viewed through the lens of obligations assigned to the body of royal agents. The topic thus deserves its own treatment and will be discussed thoroughly in the final chapter of this thesis. The following issues involved military obligations but most clearly fall under this chapter's main focus of functions concerned with the locality.

As discussed above, ealdormen may have assisted in the raising of the Danegeld which indicated that their duties had evolved beyond mere martial activities. One could argue that collecting the Danegeld was interconnected with military leadership; a royal agent could chose to pay tribute rather than lead an army. Yet, the treaty between King Æthelred and the Viking leader, Olaf, probably issued soon after Byrhtnoth's death, indicates another function that the high-ranking royal agents may have performed.⁶⁶ The first item in the treaty reported that a general peace was made between Æthelred and the raiding army with the king giving them tribute. They established the peace 'according to

⁶⁶ *EHD*, no. 42. It cannot be any later then 994x5 as that is when Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury (mentioned in the treaty) died.

the terms which Archbishop Sigeric, Ealdorman Æthelweard and Ealdorman Ælfric made, *when they obtained permission from the king to purchase peace for the areas which they had rule over, under the king* (my italics).⁶⁷ As with the actual collection of the Danegeld, this task, which at least Archbishop Sigeric and Ealdormen Æthelweard and Ælfric performed, was not a military duty but did involve the decision of whether to lead a host against an enemy. Like Byrhtnoth's choices and death at the Battle of Maldon, these three royal agents' ability to buy peace for their own region would have had both local and national importance and repercussions.

The most difficult duty to uncover from Æthelwine's complaint was the distributing of military pay [*distribuendorum militibus stipendiorum*]. Most recorded instances of an ealdorman with the army involved situations which were clearly military expeditions or levying the *fyrð*. On the minute details of whether these soldiers served unpaid or if their leaders provided them rations, the sources remain silent. Yet, small clues scattered across several texts, if pieced together, create an unfocused but useful picture. Perhaps most helpful is the description found in the beginning of the Domesday folios on Berkshire which reports:

If the king sent out an army somewhere from 5 hides only one soldier [*miles*] went out. And for his supplies [*victus*] or pay [*stipendium*] from each hide was given to him 4s for two months. This money was not sent to the king but given to the soldiers [*milites*]. If anyone was summoned on military service but did not go he forfeited all his land to the king. But if anyone staying behind promised to send another for himself and yet he who should have been sent stayed behind his lord was quit for 50s.⁶⁸

If this estimate can be believed, when the national levy was called out, every five hides of land in Berkshire supplied one man to fight. Not only did every landowner have an obligation to either go himself or find a man to fight in his place but the owners of the hides also had to provide a wage for the soldier. Thus, for sixty days of soldiering a man received twenty shillings. Richard Abels has argued that English economy in the tenth

⁶⁷ *EHD*, no. 42.1.

⁶⁸ *DB*, i, 56v.

and eleventh centuries could have supported the paying of such a wage.⁶⁹ These men thus collected payment for their military service although they were not mercenaries.⁷⁰ Abels suggests the use of stipendiary soldier as a better term for these men as they served not merely for a wage but also out of loyalty and obligation.⁷¹ Interestingly, money did not go to the king unless it was a fine for dereliction of duty. The Domesday survey of Worcestershire also reported a fine of forty shillings because of the lord of the missing soldier who in turn forwarded it to the king.⁷² The Worcestershire Domesday furthermore emphasised that this occurred after a lord had received a summons from the king and led his men to join the main army.⁷³ Additionally William of Malmesbury reports that King Harold led both mercenaries and stipendiary troops (*stipendiarios et mercennarios milites*) to the Battle of Hastings.⁷⁴ Finally, by the tenth century household retainers, found in both royal and aristocratic houses, may have also received coins for payment rather than items like rings as their predecessors in the *comitatus* had.⁷⁵

So where does this leave us with Æthelwine's complaint? It actually offers a lot of possibilities. The East Anglian ealdorman may have grumbled about ensuring his personal household troops received payment at regular intervals. Possibly he had to collect fines for negligence in answering the royal summons from around his ealdordom and confirm the money made it to the king. Or another explanation and perhaps the

⁶⁹ R. Abels, 'Household Men, Mercenaries, and Vikings in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Mercenaries and Paid Men: The Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. France (Boston, 2008), pp. 143-66 (p. 154).

⁷⁰ For possible mercenaries in the classical sense in Anglo-Saxon England, Abels suggests Vikings, *liðsmen*, and *butsecarl*. See Abels, 'Household Men', 157-60. For a discussion of *liðsmen* and their high wages also see J. Campbell, 'Some Agents and Agencies of the late-Anglo-Saxon State', in *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), pp. 201-26 (pp 206-07).

⁷¹ Abels, 'Household Men', p. 144. C.W. Hollister would disagree with this assessment and label these men as mercenaries because they receive pay, see C. W. Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions on the Eve of the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 9-10. I have chosen to follow Abels in this instance as I believe his definition allows for more nuanced understanding of both military service and relationships between warrior and lord. For a thorough discussion of the development and range of such relationships related to military service see R. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1988), particularly pp. 97-160 are revelant.

⁷² DB, i, 172.

⁷³ DB, i, 172.

⁷⁴ GR, ii.228.12.

⁷⁵ Abels, 'Household Men', p. 157.

simplest (although for the ealdormen not the easiest to implement) was, as the lord of the local troops, ensuring that all men had their shillings when called up. To complicate matters, the Anglo-Saxons did not own land in convenient five hide groupings but rather in a variety of sizes including half hides. Additionally, even if Abels' point about the ability of the English to make payment in monetary form was true did not mean landowners could easily produce four shillings per hide at all times. Thus in some ways it makes sense for the leader of the local levy not only to lead the correct number of men to the king but also to verify they had received their sixty day wage. If they had not done so it may have required the ealdorman (or even the bishop or reeve) to step in, collect, and distribute the stipend.

Clarity in this case is probably not possible; the sources are too vague and in all cases for this issue come from post-Conquest documents. This may be a case of reading a duty back onto an official who did not have it. The silence of the pre-Conquest sources, however, does not necessarily rule out the distribution of military stipends to certain groups of men. It may have been an exhausting responsibility to oversee. Yet, royal agents performed duties beyond military functions and activities related to dealing with the enemy. We will now turn to the other activities mentioned in Æthelwine's complaint.

Duties of Ealdormen—'judging pleas' and 'conducting cases against the guilty'

According to the Hundred Ordinance, issued in the mid-tenth century, the shire court should meet twice a year.⁷⁶ Furthermore, it was to be convened in the presence of the bishop of the diocese and the ealdorman and both were 'to expound both the ecclesiastical and the secular law.'⁷⁷ Unfortunately, little evidence survives to show that these high-ranking officials attended such meetings nor that the shires actually met annually for the prescribed number of times. The best examples appear in the post-Conquest *Liber*

⁷⁶ The Hundred Ordinance, 5.1.

⁷⁷ The Hundred Ordinance, 5.2.

Eliensis. While not a contemporary source for late Anglo-Saxon royal agents, the *Liber Eliensis* may give some insight into how Ealdorman Æthelwine conducted himself at shire meetings in East Anglia. The ealdorman seems to have attended a large number of meetings, although at times hundred and shire assemblies are indistinguishable. One such lawsuit, however, does indicate how a case could have travelled from the hundred court to the shire court as well as how the local ealdorman involved himself in the process. The *Liber Eliensis* recorded how the Ely abbey came to possess an estate called Stonea. At some point after the donation, the monastery leased the land to kinsmen of the previous owners. Eventually these relatives, led by Beahmund of Holland claimed the estate as their own ‘without adjudication or the legal consent of the citizens and the hundred-men.’⁷⁸ The abbot of Ely thus brought the case before the hundred court and the *Liber* describes the resulting actions:

Ealdorman Æthelwine came to Ely, and Beahmund and the others had been called and summoned for this suit to a meeting of the citizens and the hundred-men once, twice, and indeed, many times, but they were never willing to come. However, the abbot. . . kept renewing and restating this same suit many times, and so kept making this complaint before the people. In the end Ealdorman Æthelwine came to Cambridge and held there a great meeting of the citizens and the hundred-men before twenty-four judges below *Therningefeld* near *Maidendberge*.⁷⁹

The abbot’s persistence combined with the refusal of the accused to defend themselves before the hundred seemingly forced the calling of a shire meeting to hear and rule upon the case. The abbot’s diligence paid off and the shire court awarded him the estate as well as compensation. The shire judges also ordered Beahmund and his kinsmen to pay a fine to the king. Whether a portion of this fine went to the ealdorman remains unclear.

This particular situation raises several questions about the activities of ealdormen. Foremost, it remains difficult to gauge whether Æthelwine’s actions were typical of a late tenth-century ealdorman. On the one hand, if these represented the normal activities for the ealdormen, then Æthelwine may have simply followed the edicts from the Hundred

⁷⁸ *LE*, ii.24.

⁷⁹ *LE*, ii.24.

Ordinance. On the other hand, the Ordinance could have merely codified what already occurred at the hundredal level. If, instead, the Hundred Ordinance existed to encourage the ealdormen to take part in the local political sphere, it offered no discernible incentive beyond following the royal will. Often the ealdormen's desire to become involved in the local politics arose from the fact that they were among one of the major landowners in the locality. The fines of the court (earl's penny or third penny) may have also served as motivation. Essentially their involvement was probably based purely on their own self interests. Of course Æthelwine's actions may not reveal typical behaviour. If so, why did he involve himself in local matters? One possibility may have been his interest in the reformed monasteries. The location or more specifically the local power dynamics between ealdorman, the East Anglian bishop, and monasteries may have also contributed to Æthelwine's ready involvement in local affairs.

In addition to Æthelwine, Ealdorman Byrhtnoth apparently called the whole of Huntingdonshire together and 'without delay a very great assembly was held' to determine who owned the estate at Bluntisham.⁸⁰ Thus, we have two different ealdormen calling shire meetings. Here the lack of documentation becomes particularly frustrating. There is no evidence about how often ealdormen took it upon themselves to order a shire meeting and whether Æthelwine and Byrhtnoth represent exceptional royal agents in following the obligations laid out in the Hundred Ordinance. Both Æthelwine and Byrhtnoth stood out in the length of time they held the ealdorman office. Their time as a royal agent may have led them to calling and attending (more) shire meetings than other ealdormen. Æthelwine and Byrhtnoth were also on good terms with the local monasteries from which we get most of our information. These two factors may explain why their activities appeared more in records at the local level than any other ealdorman.

⁸⁰ *LE*, ii.25.

The *Liber Eliensis* focused on the land-holdings of the monastery but other issues were also handled at the local level. According to the various law-codes throughout the period, royal agents took part in the judicial system within a region. Yet as Simon Keynes has rightly pointed out, ‘the difficulty (as Wormald has observed) is to find a connection between the world of the Anglo-Saxon law-codes, and the real world of Anglo-Saxon crime and punishment.’⁸¹ Herein lies the inherent problem with using law-codes as sources. These codes came from the great assemblies and were issued in the reigning king’s name. A group could respond to a law-code as exemplified in a few surviving examples.⁸² Therefore, the picture painted by these codes deserves careful treatment as it may reflect the king’s wishes rather than actual practice. Still, it remains necessary to consider the ideal the law-codes present and compare it to evidence in any other sources to determine what functions royal agents performed in terms of local justice.

A survey of the law-codes for the duties specific to ealdormen, bishops, and reeves revealed an interesting pattern. The later in the pre-Conquest period a king issued a law-code, the less direct mention of ealdormen it displayed. Ealdormen (or earls) seem almost non-existent and bishops and reeves appear prominently in comparison. For example, the laws of Ine state: ‘that true law and true statutes might be established and strengthened throughout our people, so that none of the ealdormen or of our subjects might afterwards pervert these our decrees’.⁸³ Two centuries later King Æthelstan commanded all bishops, ealdorman and reeves to ‘observe the peace just as I and my

⁸¹ S. Keynes, ‘Royal government and the written word in late Anglo-Saxon England’, in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 226-57 (p. 243).

⁸² See The Ordinance of the bishops and reeves of London in the reign of King Æthelstan (VI As). For text with English translation see *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, ed. F. Attenborough (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 156-69. For a discussion of this document see P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, Volume I Legislation and its Limits* (London, 2001), pp. 296-99. For discussion of how VI Æthelstan fits within the rest of King Æthelstan’s codes see S. Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven, 2011), pp. 137-38; D. Pratt, ‘Written Law and the Communication of Authority in Tenth-Century England’, in *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century*, ed. D. Rollason, C. Leyser, and H. Williams (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 331-50; and L. Roach, ‘Law Codes and Legal Norms in Later Anglo-Saxon England’, *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), 465-86 (pp. 468-79).

⁸³ Laws of Ine, Prologue.

councillors have enacted it.’⁸⁴ While Cnut’s letter of 1027 exhorts in one paragraph ‘I implore and command my councillors, to whom I have entrusted the councils of the kingdom, that from now on they shall not in any way either for fear of me or for the favour of any powerful person, consent to any injustice, or suffer it to flourish in any part of my kingdom’.⁸⁵ Cnut’s letter was distinctly unclear whether he meant secular and ecclesiastical persons but made no direct reference to reeves. In an earlier letter as well as later on in the letter of 1027, however, Cnut did mention reeves and indicated that they should work in conjunction with bishops.⁸⁶ While even Ine, the earliest king in these examples, had concerns about his highest-ranking secular leaders abusing their positions of authority, we can see a shift in focus to lower level officials. Other Anglo-Saxon rulers worried about abuse of office as well but they generally directed their exhortations at their reeves.⁸⁷ The reason behind these pointed exhortations includes two possibilities, reeves may have misused their powers more frequently than ealdormen or the higher officials may not have taken part regularly in local issues.

Returning to the example from Æthelstan’s reign, the king commanded all three types of royal officials to uphold the peace but notably only threatened the reeve with punishment for failing to do so. If an official did not follow the dictates of his position, the king removed him from office and no longer offered friendship to the man.⁸⁸ The lack of directly stated consequences for bishops and ealdormen who also received commands to uphold justice may indicate that, in general, Æthelstan (and other Anglo-Saxon kings) felt confident only in explicit threats against reeves.⁸⁹ As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the king could order ealdormen exiled, maimed, or even killed, while bishops,

⁸⁴ VI As, 11.

⁸⁵ Letter of Cnut (1027), 11.

⁸⁶ Letter of Cnut (1020), 11 and Letter of Cnut (1027), 11.

⁸⁷ See IV Eg, 1.5; VIII Atr, 32 (protect abbots); Cn Letter (1020), 11; Cn Letter (1027), 12; II As, 25.

⁸⁸ VI As, 11.

⁸⁹ The laws of Ine are the only lawcode I have come across which has an explicit threat against ealdormen who do not properly perform their duties. Ine, 36.1: ‘If he is an ealdorman [lets a thief go], he is to lose his office, unless the king wishes to pardon him.’

although rarely removed from office, could find themselves banished from the royal court if they earned the king's displeasure. Ealdormen and bishops undoubtedly proved more difficult to remove from office than reeves and perhaps the kings purposefully only commanded without direct written threats to allow themselves time to punish these highest royal agents. Bishops and ealdormen were powerful in their own right and could have strong local ties, based on either family or a long reign, and thus be entrenched in local society. Two examples will suffice here, Eadwig's apparent exile of Bishop Cynsige of Lichfield from his court in the late 950s and Cnut's execution of Eadric Streona a year after confirming him as ealdorman of Mercia.⁹⁰

Most of the laws which dealt with or mentioned ealdormen emphasised their high social status. For examples, anyone caught forcibly entering an ealdorman's dwelling, drawing a weapon in his presence or breaking his surety paid a fine.⁹¹ Alfred's law-code states: 'If anyone fights or draws a weapon in the presence of the archbishop, he is to pay 150 shillings compensation; if this happens in the presence of another bishop or an ealdorman, he is to pay 100 shillings compensation.'⁹² While Cnut's second law-code commands, 'if anyone violates a diocesan bishop's or an ealdorman's surety, he is to compensate for it with two pounds'.⁹³ Not only did these law-codes highlight the status of an ealdorman they also support one of the main principles of this thesis, that ealdormen and bishops, despite coming from different family groups, were considered social equals.⁹⁴

Furthermore an ealdorman (or sometimes a bishop) could also receive a fine or portion of one from judicial proceedings. A set of fines referred to as the third penny, the payment of this type was often a multiple of three, with two-thirds paid to the king and

⁹⁰ See Cynsige's lack of attestations during these years in Keynes, *Atlas*, Table XLVIII. For Eadric Streona's confirmation as ealdorman of Mercia see ASC C s.a. 1017.

⁹¹ See Ine, 6.2, 45; Alfred, 3, 15, 38-38.2, 40; III Atr, 12; II Cn, 15.2, 30.6, 58.2, 71a.

⁹² Alfred, 15.

⁹³ II Cn, 58.2.

⁹⁴ Archbishops appear to have been considered the same as an ætheling in terms of the amount of a fine charged. See II Cn, 58.1.

the final third given to the local ealdorman.⁹⁵ Again II Cnut provides a clear example: ‘And he who refuses to follow just law and just judgment, is to be liable to pay [a fine] in the area under English law to him who has a right to it, either to the king 120 shillings, or to the earl 60 shillings, or to the hundred 30 shillings, or to each of them, if it so happens’.⁹⁶ Between the third penny and the other laws which emphasise the ealdormen’s status, it becomes clear even without really examining any other source that these royal agents were socially important men. Yet the examples cited above provide something else as well, an image of ealdormen as passive members of the judicial system. Their status was defined in terms of fines and compensation owed to them but they themselves were not prescribed any duty.

Indeed it requires careful study to find active ealdormen in the royal law-codes. Examples do exist but in case of the later law-codes it remains unclear if the duties applied to all ealdormen or just a specific event in each individual case. The laws of Ine indicate that men involved in a law-suit could intercede with the local ealdorman.⁹⁷ Alfred’s law-code provide a few more possible activities, including acting as a witness for a man who decided to seek a lord outside his own district and appointing a deputy to attend regional meetings for him.⁹⁸ This code additionally offers one other activity in which ealdormen may have participated—lending support to a man besieging another in order to obtain justice. It reads: ‘If he [the attacker] has not sufficient power to besiege him in his house, he is to ride to the ealdorman and ask him for support; if he will not give him support he is to ride to the king, before having recourse to fighting.’⁹⁹ While an ealdorman’s duties may have included providing help to those seeking justice at the local

⁹⁵ For a concise but helpful overview of the third penny in late Anglo-Saxon England see S. Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 89-97.

⁹⁶ II Cn, 15.2.

⁹⁷ Ine, 50: ‘If a *gesith*-born man intercedes with the king or the king’s ealdorman or with his lord for members of his household, slaves or freemen, he, the *gesith*, has no right to any fines, because he would not previously at home restrain them from wrong-doing.’

⁹⁸ Alfred, 37 and 38.2.

⁹⁹ Alfred, 42.3.

level from obstinate offenders, the final line indicated the royal official did not always exert himself to do so. If an ealdorman did participate in such an event this may represent the activities Æthelwine referred to when he spoke of conducting cases against the guilty.

In the Hundred Ordinance the king declared that he wanted the local ealdorman and bishop to be present at shire meetings 'there to expound both the ecclesiastical and the secular law'.¹⁰⁰ Again whether this codified something already happening or the king's attempt to encourage his royal agents across the kingdom to attend to their local duties remains uncertain. If Ealdorman Æthelwine's complaint of being worn out by, among other responsibilities, judging pleas and prosecuting the guilty is true then the king may have just been sanctioning a practice already in place. As the ealdordoms grew bigger the ealdormen may well have exhausted themselves if they actually attended the two annual shire meetings in the various shires encompassed in their region.

Æthelred's third law-code reveals the royal aspiration that ealdormen and reeves work together, at least in the region of the Five Boroughs, 'And the peace which the ealdorman and the king's reeve give in the meeting of the Five Boroughs, that is to be atoned for with twelve hundred.'¹⁰¹ As secular royal agents ealdormen's and reeves' duties must have overlapped on a regular basis. Reeves appear as implementing the decisions of a local assembly, if ealdormen attended shire meetings even if only semi-regularly they would have had to deal with the local reeves.¹⁰² One would think that a good working relationship would have benefited both ealdorman and reeve. The silence or vagueness of the sources, however, makes it impossible to get a clear picture of this relationship or even what functions ealdormen as agents performed. Some careers of individual ealdormen do provide glimpses of their activities and give evidence that

¹⁰⁰ The Hundred Ordinance, 5.2.

¹⁰¹ III Atr, 1.1.

¹⁰² For translation and commentary see S. Keynes, 'The Fonthill Letter', in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Korhammer (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 53-97.

ealdormen had duties outside of their founding function as military leader. Whether, like most office holders, every ealdorman performed every duty he was supposed to as royal agent remains uncertain.

THE OFFICE OF BISHOP

Duties of Bishops—Royal Service

As with the examination of the late Anglo-Saxon ealdormen, I am interpreting Æthelwine's reference to 'royal service' as those duties bishops did pertaining to the kingdom as whole (or at least affecting a larger area than their home diocese). We know bishops attended royal assemblies, acted as treaty negotiators, likely aided in tribute collection and acted as the king's representatives in foreign courts. As these duties have been discussed in detail in the proceeding chapter alongside the ealdormen's duties we will proceed to the other aspects of the East Anglian leader's complaint to see if bishops were also performing similar duties in their home region.

Duties of Bishops—Military Duties

Unlike their secular counterparts the position of bishop did not arise from military leadership. This difference in origin, however, did not preclude prelates from participating in martial activities. Several examples of bishops involved in or asked to be a part of both armed expeditions and defensive measures exist in the surviving Anglo-Saxon texts. Bishop Ealhstan of Sherborne provides the earliest example; in 825 he helped lead a force against a neighbouring king.¹⁰³ Others appear in military situations in the annals for 845 and 871. In 992 King Æthelred put the navy under the command of two ealdormen and two bishops.¹⁰⁴ More clergy involved in military activities appeared the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the annals for the eleventh century. The chroniclers

¹⁰³ ASC s.a. 825.

¹⁰⁴ ASC s.a. 992.

recorded senior clergymen involved in martial activities particularly during Cnut's conquest of England and when reporting on events along the Welsh border. The surviving number sources only noted a relatively small number of clergymen involved in military affairs. Yet, the majority of them received no more than passing comments from contemporary writers. The lack of criticism indicates that the recorded military clerics were not unique or unusual to their flocks, fellow agents or king. Indeed, in a few of the examples mentioned it appears as if an Anglo-Saxon king made blatant use of his episcopal royal agents in a martial capacity. With the exception of Bishop Leofgar of Hereford (d. 1056) however, the sources remain silent to what extent prelates participated on the battlefield and many may have contributed moral support as a local and religious leader rather than as a warrior. The extent of their military obligations and how they may or may not have conflicted with their roles as religious leaders will be explored thoroughly in the last chapter.

Duties of Bishops—'judging pleas' and 'conducting cases against the guilty'

Although the Hundred Ordinance dictated that the shire meeting be held in the presence of the ealdorman and diocesan bishop, the *Liber Eliensis* provided only one example of the bishop of East Anglia attending a shire assembly.¹⁰⁵ Again, the special dynamics among the area's bishop, ealdorman, and monasteries may have contributed to the prelate's absence. Perhaps his lack of regional power made it pointless for a bishop to attend or he may have often sided against the monasteries because of their stranglehold on the land ownership in East Anglia. Finally we should ponder whether Ely's record keepers often ignored a prelate's presence at such assemblies because of the bishop's relationship to the monasteries. Whatever the reasoning for the absence of the East

¹⁰⁵ *LE*, ii.11. A meeting held at Wansford involving the widow of Leofsige. Evidence for another bishop attending a shire meeting across the kingdom in Herefordshire can be found in S 1462. For a translation of the lawsuit see *AS Charters*, no. 78.

Anglian prelate, few other documents give concrete examples of clergymen being involved in shire and hundred courts.

Unlike the passive role of the ealdorman described in the law-codes, bishops (alongside reeves) emerged as much more active participators in the judicial practices. Late Anglo-Saxon prelates appeared in the secular law-codes as part of the justice system, particularly in cases involving morality.¹⁰⁶ For example, during Alfred's reign, if a man did not fulfil a duty he pledged to do he was to turn himself into prison for forty days and perform whatever penance the bishop assigned him.¹⁰⁷ Bishops, understandably, also acted as the main judges in issues dealing with churches and men (and women) in holy orders. No one could remove a nun from a nunnery without the king's and local bishop's permission.¹⁰⁸ The royal and ecclesiastical reactions to Swein Godwinson's abduction of Abbess Eadgifu of Leominster in 1046 revealed that this was an actual concern. Furthermore, bishops acted as judges or, at least, had heavy involvement with any case where a cleric committed or was the victim of a crime.¹⁰⁹

A prelate's participation in cases concerning false pledges or ecclesiastical issues makes sense given their episcopal role. Law-codes from three separate kings, Æthelstan, Edgar, and Cnut offer three more duties assigned to diocesan bishops. The second law-code of Æthelstan commands, 'and the bishop in whose diocese it lies is to exact the fine for disobedience from the reeve'.¹¹⁰ Edgar's third code exhorts that any judge found knowingly giving a wrong judgement is to be stripped of his thegnly status 'and the

¹⁰⁶ Often this 'morality' dealt with broken or false oaths but could also involve issues such as the keeping of a concubine. See II Cn, 54.1.

¹⁰⁷ Alfred, 1.2: '[If, however, he pledges what it is right for him to perform,] and leaves it unfulfilled, let him with humility give his weapons and his possessions into his friends' keeping and be 40 days in prison at a king's estate, endure there what penance the bishop prescribes for him, and his kinsmen are to feed him if he has no food himself.' The laws of Ine, 13 is in a similar vein, assigning a fine of 120 shillings to anyone who bears false witness in the presence of the bishop. See also II As, 26 and II Cn, 36.

¹⁰⁸ Alfred, 8.

¹⁰⁹ See Alfred, 21; V Atr, 6 and 10.2; VII Æthelred 27; II Cn, 42 and 43.

¹¹⁰ II As, 25.1.

bishop of the diocese is to exact the compensation on the king's behalf'.¹¹¹ Finally, Cnut's second law-code instructs that if an accused person fails his exculpation the bishop should give judgement.¹¹² An additional clerical responsibility within the judicial system, the purification of the articles used in ordeal, appeared in a surviving pontifical rather than the law-codes.¹¹³ The clergy's responsibility in the ordeal did not end there, as Mary Giandrea has shown, 'the ceremony surrounding the ordeal and the ordeal itself were thoroughly ecclesiastical.'¹¹⁴ Although the ceremony for ordeal survived in the pontifical, the document gives no indication that a bishop had to oversee the actual proceeding as the liturgy generally uses the words *sacerdos* or *presbyter* rather than *episcopus*.¹¹⁵ That a priest could conduct an ordeal was further supported by the *Northumbrian Priests' Law* which fined a priest who oversaw an ordeal incorrectly. Furthermore, the ceremonies for the lay ordeals generally survived in the vernacular while those specifically for the clergy appeared in Latin.¹¹⁶ Given all the other obligations they seemed to have responsibility for, it should not surprise us that a bishop would designate a priest to oversee the ordeal ceremony if his attention was needed elsewhere. Even if the ordeal may not have required his presence, a bishop likely had to give his approval for the ceremony to take place and designate a location.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ III Eg, 3.

¹¹² II Cn, 53.1 and 56.1. Law 53.1 also exhorts that the bishop 'judge sternly'.

¹¹³ Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture*, pp. 108-09 and S. Keefer, 'Manuals', in *The Liturgical Books of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. R. W. Pfaff (Kalamazoo, MI, 1995), pp. 99-110 (pp. 108-09).

¹¹⁴ Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture*, p. 108. For a discussion of how elaborate the ceremonies could be, see D. W. Rollason, *Two Anglo-Saxon Rituals: the Dedication of a Church and Judicial Ordeal* (Leicester, 1988), pp. 12-14.

¹¹⁵ R. W. Pfaff, 'The Anglo-Saxon Bishop and his Book', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 81 (1999), 3-24 (p. 18).

¹¹⁶ For the *Northumbrian Priests' Law* see C&S, no. 63 §39. For a discussion of the ordeal ceremonies in Latin or the vernacular see S. L. Keefer, 'Ut in omnibus honorificetur Deus: the cōrsnæd ordeal in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe* ed. J. Hill and M. Swan (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 237-64 (pp. 247 n49).

¹¹⁷ R. Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford, 1986), p. 99. These requirements are found in the laws of William the Conqueror but not something that would have been out of place in the Anglo-Saxon system. Where these approved locations were is somewhat unclear. Eadmer claims Archbishop Cuthbert added an addition to his cathedral purely to have a place for baptism and judicial ordeal. M. Franklin, 'The Cathedral as Parish Church. The case of Southern England', in *Church and City, 1000-1500: Essays in Honour of Christopher Brooke*, ed. D. Abulafia, M. J. Franklin, and M. Rubin (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 173-98 (p. 178). Conversely, III Atr 6.1 requires ordeals to take place at royal

The first two examples in particular cast interesting light on the Anglo-Saxon judicial system. They suggest that when a reeve or judge abused his office the local prelate extracted the fine from the corrupt official. That the law-codes did not assign ealdormen such a task perhaps indicated that the diocesan bishop likely involved himself in local justice more regularly. Conversely, the Anglo-Saxons may have viewed corruption in office as a moral issue and thus it fell under (at least in part) the jurisdiction of the church. Still, reeves could be quite powerful local figures, a pre-requisite for enforcing the king's will, and one must wonder how the bishop was supposed to collect a fine if the reeve did not wish to pay. Perhaps the bishop went to the local ealdorman if he had persistent trouble with a reeve. Possibly, these three classes of agents have acted as a series of checks on each other's power at the local level.

The expectation that prelates (as well as lesser clergy) judged lawsuits appears scattered throughout the surviving Anglo-Saxon corpus. While the law-codes provide an idea of what the king and his councillors saw as the proper amount of episcopal participation in the justice system, specific instances have proved elusive to find. Two documents from the reign of Æthelred, however, do provide a glimpse of bishops participating in cases at the shire level. In the early 990s a land dispute arose between Wynflæd and Leofwine, which also involved the king and current Archbishop of Canterbury. King Æthelred sent his seal, via Abbot Ælfhere of Bath, to 'all the councillors that were summoned there [Cuckhamsley Hill (Oxon)] — namely Bishop Æthelsige and Bishop Æscwig and Abbot Ælfric and all the shire — and bade and commanded that they should reconcile Wynflæd and Leofwine as justly as they considered most just for ever.'¹¹⁸ Here we find not one but two bishops and an abbot attending a shire moot as well as a fourth high-ranking clergyman acting as the king's

manors. Perhaps this was to reaffirm that while the ceremony might be ecclesiastical it was the king's justice being dispensed.

¹¹⁸ S 1454. The named shire court attendees were the bishops of Sherborne and Dorchester, while Ælfric was abbot of St Albans.

representative. Because the king had taken an interest in the case the clergymen may have themselves been more inclined to attend. However, this may just provide a glimpse of what an actual shire court attendance list looked like. After all, the eleventh-century writ-charters from the kings to the individual shire courts often addressed the local ealdorman, bishop, and leading men of the shire.¹¹⁹

The bishop and the reeve appear in the second document from Æthelred's reign, a land dispute over an estate in Kent between Godwine, bishop of Rochester, and Leofwine, son of Ælfheah. The case had apparently been brought before the king who sent a letter and his seal to Archbishop Ælfric of Canterbury ordering the archbishop, along with his thegns, to settle the matter.¹²⁰ The dispute was resolved at the shire level by the negotiators [ærendracan] Abbots Ælfhun and Wulfric, Leofric the sheriff, Siward, Wulfstan of Saltwood and Ælfhem, Ordhelm's son.¹²¹ While the actual judges of the case do not include a bishop, Archbishop Ælfric seems to have overseen the entire proceedings and topped the list of the witnesses.¹²² Senior clergymen can be found in the witness lists of other similar documents. For this particular case, we cannot know whether these clergymen took a more active role because the king (and archbishop) had an interest. Still, this dispute did include a bishop in the case itself whereas the previous lawsuit mentioned involved two lay people thus the status of the claimants does not appear to affect whether a bishop or abbot sat in judgement at the local level. While outside factors may have existed, the involvement of clergymen in both cases seems to indicate that they participated in the judicial system at the shire. Thus, the royal ideal presented in the lawcodes had some basis in reality.

¹¹⁹ See R. Sharpe, 'The Use of Writs in the Eleventh Century', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2003), 247-91 (pp. 251-52). For examples of writs see S 946 and S 1462.

¹²⁰ S 1456: Æthelred 'gave orders the he [Archbishop Ælfric] and his thegns in East Kent and West Kent should settle the dispute between them justly, weighing both claim and counter-claim.'

¹²¹ S 1456. Ælfhun appears to have been the abbot of Muchelney and possibly later bishop of London while Wulfric was abbot of St. Augustine's Canterbury. This land dispute is a very interesting case of apparently passing the claim up the chain to King Æthelred who promptly sent it back down to the shire level.

¹²² S 1456.

The works of the early eleventh-century Archbishop Wulfstan II of York support this idea, particularly his ‘The Bishop’s Duties’ or *Episcopus*.¹²³ It is unclear whether this document represented what Wulfstan thought episcopal rights and powers should be or what they were at the time.¹²⁴ Henry Loyn perhaps put it best, ‘the tract [*Episcopus*] presents a typical mishmash of the theoretical and practical.’¹²⁵ The archbishop writes that a bishop should seek peace and reconciliation both in working with secular judges and overseeing exculpation of the accused.¹²⁶ Wulfstan continues that a prelate must also never knowingly accept a false weight or measurement or measuring machine for it was ‘fitting that every law, whether law of a borough or law of a country district, should go by his advice and his witness...least any man do wrong to another and by that sin all too greatly.’¹²⁷ The use of false measurements was a form of stealing and therefore a moral issue. Thus, at least for Archbishop Wulfstan, a bishop should not only listen to land disputes but also examine measuring devices in his diocese to ensure that they all gave the correct measurements.

Land disputes and moral issues could easily fall under the jurisdiction of a bishop or even an abbot. But what of those cases involving maiming or the death penalty? Canon law forbade clergymen from any involvement in bloodshed. Many clerics interpreted this as including an exclusion from sitting in judgement on cases which could lead to the spilling of blood. Interestingly, the two most prolific writers of the late Anglo-Saxon period, the contemporaries Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham and Archbishop Wulfstan,

¹²³ It is included in *II Polity* in Junius 121 a manuscript of Wulfstan’s works even though scholars do not believe it was originally part of the *Polity*. This particular work was given the title *Episcopus* by Felix Liebermann. It is hard to date but may represent a fairly early stage of Wulfstan’s writings. See the introduction to Whitelock’s translation in C&S, no. 56.

¹²⁴ See C&S, introduction for no. 56. For recent discussions of this document and Wulfstan’s views of episcopal power see D. B. Loomis, ‘*Regnum and Sacerdotium in the Early Eleventh Century*’, in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 129-46 (pp. 143-44) and H. R. Loyn, *The English Church, 940-1154* (Harlow, 2000), p. 6.

¹²⁵ Loyn, *English Church*, p. 6.

¹²⁶ C&S, no. 56 §3-5.

¹²⁷ C&S, no. 56 §6. Miller makes a very interesting comparison between ordeal and judgement of the scales thus bishops duties in the judicial realm may have all been seen as interrelated by the Anglo-Saxons. See W. I. Miller, *Eye for an Eye* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 2-3.

disagreed over whether a clergyman could participate in cases that could lead to bloodshed. Ælfric wrote in a letter to the archbishop, ‘We may not be concerned in any man’s death. Even though he is a homicide or murderer or a great thief, yet we must not prescribe death for him. We may never give judgment about that.’¹²⁸ The abbot also included the following in his *Lives of the Saints* about a bishop who had condemned thieves to death: ‘the holy canon forbid men in orders, both bishops and priests, to have to do with thieves because it does not pertain to those that are chosen to God’s service that they should agree to any man’s death, if they are the Lord’s thanes.’¹²⁹ Thus, for Ælfric, the clergy should exclude themselves from judicial cases that involved crimes which might result in the death penalty. His contemporary, Wulfstan, disagreed. The archbishop wrote on many topics including on the duties and responsibilities of bishops.¹³⁰ In his letter on the duties of bishops, Wulfstan notes that all Christians should love the right and hate the wrong but especially clerics should ‘must always raise up what is right and suppress wrong, therefore bishops must always dictate judgments along with secular judges, so that, if it is in their power, they do not consent that any wrong springs up there’.¹³¹ Wulfstan clearly believed that bishops had a responsibility to sit in judgment with lay leaders. His justification of course was that the clergy could ensure the courts in their diocese passed no unjust decisions. It can perhaps be argued even further that acting as a judge was an extension of pastoral care. In other words, if a bishop refused to participate in certain cases, like Ælfric insisted, and allowed corrupt officials to pass unfair judgements the prelate might in fact have failed in his role as protector of his flock.

¹²⁸ ‘Ælfric’s First Old English Letter for Wulfstan’ in C&S, no. 201: ‘We ne noton beon ymbe mannes deað. Ðeah he manslaga beo oþþe morðfremmende oþþe mycel þeofman, swaþeah we ne sylan him deað geþæcean. Na we ne notan deman ymbe þæt.’ Ælfric also included a similar exhortation in the Latin version of this letter.

¹²⁹ *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints* ed. and trans. W.W. Skeat, vol 2 (Oxford, 1966), ch. 32: ‘þa halgan canones gehadodum forbeodað ge bisceopum ge preostum to beonne embe þeofas for þan þe hit ne gebyraþ þam þe beoð gecorene gode to þegnigenne þæt hi geþwærlæcan sceolon on æniges mannes deaðe gif hi beoð drihtnes þenas.’

¹³⁰ See C&S, nos. 55 and 56.

¹³¹ C&S, no. 56 §9: ‘Eallum Cristenum mannum gebyreð þæt hi riht lufian 7 unriht ascunian; 7 huru gehadode men scylon a riht reran 7 unriht alecgan; þy sculon bisceopas mid worulddeman domas dihtan, þæt hi ne gebafian, gyf his waldan magan, þæt ðær ænig unriht up aspringe.’

The offices that these men held may have greatly influenced their viewpoints on this particular matter. Ælfric spent his life as a monk or abbot of a reformed monastery. While he may have had some secular duties assigned to him by the king he probably did not interact with the laity in the same way the archbishop was obliged to do. Wulfstan, on the other hand, held the bishopric of Worcester and later the archbishopric of York both influential positions at the royal court. It cannot be confirmed whether he ever took monastic vows, although he did seem to appreciate and promote many of the things that arose out of the tenth-century reform. Even if he began his ecclesiastical career in a monastery like Ælfric, his daily interactions with the laity would have influenced his understanding of both the secular and the ecclesiastical functions for which a prelate had obligations. While Ælfric's writings were undoubtedly influenced by his monastic background, something that likely instilled stricter adherence to the ideals for ecclesiastical life because his obligations to the laity were less, Wulfstan's opinion represented the reality of being a medieval prelate. The existence of this argument, I think points to a strong likelihood that Anglo-Saxon bishops did sit as judges in the shire and hundredal courts that fell within their home dioceses. The comments by both Ælfric and Wulfstan seem a bit too pointed and line up too well with the few surviving concrete examples to reflect a merely theoretical debate among the clergy.

Duties of Bishops—Ecclesiastical

Bishops would have acted as double agents in a very real sense, performing royal and episcopal duties in the same area. Like all ordained priests, bishops spent at least some of their time in the saying of masses, delivering sermons, hearing confessions, and providing penance to sinners. Most prelates must have succeeded in fulfilling these dual roles to a satisfactory degree otherwise the criticism of Bishop Ulf would not stand out as it does. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records for the year 1049: 'Ulf was appointed as pastor of that bishopric [Oxfordshire] which Eadnoth had held, but he was expelled from it

afterwards because he did nothing like a bishop in it, so much so that we are ashamed to say anything more about it.’¹³² The chroniclers did not criticise other bishops so directly or intriguingly but rather noted them for one particular action or perhaps political decision. For example, Ealdred of Worcester received some censure for deliberately allowing the banished Earl Harold to escape while Leofgar of Hereford’s decision to take up spear and sword against the Welsh elicited a harsh reaction.¹³³ The bishops of Edward’s reign in particular came under criticism from their contemporaries or near successors. A final example is Bishop Stigand of East Anglia. The ‘C’ version of the *Chronicle* indicates that Edward the Confessor distrusted Stigand because he was too close to Queen Emma who had not supported her son as she should have; when the king deprived his mother of her properties in 1043 Stigand also briefly lost his East Anglian see. Edward did reinstate Stigand the following year.¹³⁴ Yet, besides Ulf, the chroniclers give no indication that the rest of these prelates did not perform their episcopal duties. The critics of these bishops were the monks taught by the reforming leaders of the tenth century. Mary Giandrea has demonstrated that many of these censures may have actually originated from the dying movement’s adherents as kings again began to fill bishoprics with ‘worldly’ secular clerics rather than ‘saintly’ monks.¹³⁵ Giandrea also makes the important observation that our view of Stigand has been coloured by the writings of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman authors and that his own contemporaries may not have turned such a critical eye on the archbishop.¹³⁶ Thus, while not all late Anglo-Saxon bishops lived saintly lives, for the most part, they appear to have performed both secular and ecclesiastical duties to the minimal satisfactory degree. One has to wonder, given the

¹³² ASC D s.a. 1049: ‘Ulf preost wæs geset þam bisceoprice to hyrde þe Eadnoð hæfde, 7 he wæs syððan of adryfon, for þan þe he ne gefremede naht biscoplices þæron, swa þæt us sceamað hit nu mare to tellanne.’

¹³³ See ASC D s.a. 1051 and CD s.a. 1056. Like the criticism of Ulf the chronicler is critical in a vague sort of way only writing that Ealdred ‘could not—or would not’ capture the outlawed earl. The annal for 1056, however, is much more specific noting that Leofgar ‘gave up his chrism and his cross and his spiritual weapons, and took his pear and his sword, and so went campaigning against Griffith the Welsh king’.

¹³⁴ ASC C s.a. 1043.

¹³⁵ Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture*, p. 35.

¹³⁶ Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture*, pp. 19-21.

arguments which flared among the clergy (e.g. Wulfstan and Ælfric), if the clergy acted as their own worse critics and those prelates who received censure in the surviving (clerically derived) texts were not judged as harshly by the contemporary laity.

THE OFFICE OF REEVE

Duties of Reeves—Military duties

Ealdormen even from the earliest times appear as trusted agents of the kings they served—an obvious necessity for placing them in a position of military authority. This martial function is the clearest, and may have remained the most important duty at the local level but later entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* indicate that at least in some local skirmishes the reeve led the *fyrð*.¹³⁷ In the annal for the year 1001 which recorded the people of Hampshire's attempts at resisting the Danish raiders: 'there Æthelweard the king's high-reeve was killed, and Leofric of Whitchurch and Leofwine the king's high-reeve, and Wulfhere the bishop's thegn, and Godwine of Worthy, Bishop Ælfsige's son.'¹³⁸ The same annal continued reporting that the people of Devon met the Vikings at Pinhoe, near Exeter, with 'Kola, the king's high-reeve, and Eadsige, the king's reeve with what army they could gather'.¹³⁹ Like Ealdorman Byrhtnoth eight years previously, both instances ended in an English defeat. If an ealdorman or bishop took part in either of these military encounters his presence has gone unrecorded.

¹³⁷ This is probably best demonstrated by the frequent Welsh raids along the Anglo-Welsh border in the mid-eleventh century. The presence of reeves is often noted in these skirmishes even without ealdormen. In fact, the bishops of the region appear to have been just as likely, if not more so, to accompany the reeve and local levy in their battles against the Welsh. Of course the local ealdorman at the time, Ralph 'the Timid' was an unsuccessful military campaigner, a situation which may have forced the local reeves and prelates to step up militarily. See ASC C s.a. 1039, 1046, 1055, and 1056.

¹³⁸ ASC A s.a. 1001: '7 ðær wearð Æþelweard cinges heahgerefa ofslegen 7 Leofric æt Hwitciricean 7 Leofwine cinges heahgerefa 7 Wulfhere bisceopes ðegn 7 Godwine æt Worðige, Ælfsiges bisceopes sunu.'

¹³⁹ ASC A s.a. 1001: '7 þær wæs Kola ðæs cyninges heahgerefa 7 Eadsige þæs cynincges gerefa togeanes him mid ðære fyrð ðe hy gegaderian mihtan.'

Two years later, the *Chronicle* blamed the destruction of Exeter on Hugh, Queen Emma's reeve.¹⁴⁰ In 1011, another king's reeve, Ælfweard, appeared among those captured alongside Archbishop Ælfheah when the Danes besieged and took the city of Canterbury.¹⁴¹ Ælfweard was the only lay person named in the list of important people seized by the Vikings. While he may have been a civic administrator he likely at least helped the archbishop arrange the defence of the city. That fact that Danes could only take Canterbury through treachery demonstrates that the city had an organized defence of some sort.¹⁴² Reeves did not appear only in battles against the Vikings. In 1056, the sheriff of Hereford died alongside Leofgar the bishop of the same city in a skirmish with the Welsh.¹⁴³ Because the chronicler described Leofgar as quite a militaristic figure who actually called up the local forces remains unclear. The absence of the local earl, Ralph the Timid, however, comes across very clear in the sources.¹⁴⁴ In most cases the military functions of ealdormen appear more frequently than any other responsibility but as we can see, reeves had begun to also gather and lead armed forces if only at the local level. It may very well be that by the eleventh century the local defence had shifted to the hands of the reeves particularly if the ealdorman or earl often attended court.

Duties of Reeves—'judging pleas and conducting cases against the guilty'

As with bishops, the law-codes mention reeves on a frequent basis. What was this third member of the local royal administration assigned? Alfred and Æthelstan's law-codes commanded that all transactions occur in the presence of the reeve in order to make them binding.¹⁴⁵ The local official probably also oversaw the feeding prisoners who had no family to arrange food for them, collected tithe from any who refused to pay, and

¹⁴⁰ ASC CDE s.a. 1003.

¹⁴¹ ASC CDE s.a. 1011.

¹⁴² ASC CDE s.a. 1011. According to the *Chronicle* a subdeacon named Ælfmær let the Danes into the city.

¹⁴³ ASC CD s.a. 1056.

¹⁴⁴ Ralph had earned his nickname from a disastrous encounter with the Welsh the previous year. Another explanation for his absence is he may have been ill or dead by this point.

¹⁴⁵ Alfred 34, II As 10.

provided the king with his due from the royal estates.¹⁴⁶ The origin of the reeve may lay in this last duty. Reeves may have begun as overseers of royal manors administering the king's lands scattered throughout the realm with each official stationed at a royal centre and only gradually did the position developed into one with shire-wide duties.¹⁴⁷ VIII Æthelred reveals another duty when it orders that the royal reeves protect abbots and their interests. The clearest similar example, however, involved a bishop and he did not turn to the local reeve. During the early eleventh century, Bishop Æthelric of Sherborne addressed a writ to his local ealdorman Æthelmær complaining that some of his flock did not pay the money owed towards shipscot.¹⁴⁸ Whether Æthelmær rode to help the bishop, sent the matter on to the reeve nearest to the troublesome areas or ignored the writ is unknown. That Æthelric went to the ealdorman and not the reeve can indicate that the bishop thought a higher-ranking official needed to step in or that the local reeves were corrupt or a combination of the two.

Not surprisingly, the law-codes generally only mentioned reeves when addressing their responsibilities in the determining and administration of justice. Alfred's laws reveal the expectation that a reeve attend public meetings: 'If anyone brings up a charge in a public meeting before the king's reeve, and afterwards wishes to withdraw it, he is to make the accusation against a more likely person, if he can; if he cannot, he is to forfeit his compensation.'¹⁴⁹ The law-code was not necessarily clear whether the reeves judged cases or merely acted as important witnesses but they obviously formed part of the judicial process. Still the charge needed to be made *before* the royal reeve and while the ealdorman may have also attended and sat right beside the reeve at such a meeting, the law gives more attention to this lesser royal official.

¹⁴⁶ See Alfred, 1.3; III Eg, 3.1; and II Cn, 69.1.

¹⁴⁷ Molyneaux, *Formation*, pp. 106-09. This theory seems very plausible as the first men named as reeves in the *Chronicle* are both associated with a town. See ASC s.a. 896: 'Beornwulf, the town-reeve of Winchester' and ASC s.a. 906: 'Alfred, who was reeve at Bath.'

¹⁴⁸ S 1383.

¹⁴⁹ Alfred, 22.

Æthelred's third law-code provides a bit more description of what a reeve may have done at these public meetings. The reeve, along with the leading thegns in each wapentake, was to swear on holy relics he would not accuse the innocent nor hide the guilty.¹⁵⁰ The law continues for the reeve and thegns 'to seize the men who have frequently been accused, against whom the reeve is taking proceedings, and each of them is to pay six half marks as pledge, half to the lord of the estate and half to the wapentake.'¹⁵¹ The first part of this particular law, although addressed specifically to areas in northern and eastern England (e.g. areas settled by Vikings in the ninth century), indicates that the reeve along with the leading thegns took a serious oath upon relics not to abuse the judicial system. Yet this still remains vague as to whether these men prosecuted or judged cases or if they merely swore the oath to not abuse the power that comes with being leaders in the community. The second part of the law provides a more specific idea of duties and indicates that the reeve may have had an active role in bringing charges against accused parties. Finally III Æthelred 13 implies that as a local official, the reeve took part in the judicial proceedings (at least in some cases) by nominating the compurgators for the accused.¹⁵²

The glimpses in Æthelred's third law-code do not provide a clear idea and the reeve may not have acted as a judge per se in the judicial system but he does appear very instrumental in the shire or hundred court. He likely brought the accused before the judges. In fact, II Cnut supports this idea when it states that any man 'regarded with suspicion by all the people the king's reeve is to go thither and put him under surety that he may be brought to do justice to those who bring charges against him.'¹⁵³ This law-code as well as earlier documents from both Edward the Elder's and Æthelstan's reigns suggest that the reeve had the responsibility of bringing the accused to justice, both in riding to

¹⁵⁰ III Atr 3.1.

¹⁵¹ III Atr 3.2.

¹⁵² III Atr, 13.

¹⁵³ II Cn, 33.

his home and in tracking down a thief, and implementing whatever decision the court reached. The Fonthill letter reveals that it was the reeve, Eanwulf Peneard's son, who confiscated all the land of Helmstan the thief at Tisbury.¹⁵⁴ The author, possibly Ealdorman Ordlaſ, reports that he asked the reeve why he seized that land but gives no indication that he thought the reeve did not have the authority to do so.¹⁵⁵ Particularly as from Eanwulf's answer it appears the local court had already convicted Helmstan of cattle theft. Because Helmstan was a king's thegn his lands reverted to the king and the reeve as a royal agent was ensuring their return. There is no indication whether Eanwulf acted as one of the judges in the case only that he enforced the penalty for theft. An ordinance from the London bishops and reeves addressed to King Æthelstan, states the leading men should ride 'with the reeve in whose district it is' to recover a thief from any kindred trying to protect him.¹⁵⁶ The reeve could even collect a number of men if a large party seemed necessary.¹⁵⁷ Thus, by Æthelstan's time, the reeve appears to have had a recognized specific region of influence, possibly not yet as large as a shire but the office seems to have grown beyond its original position as administrator of a royal *villa* with its attached lands.

Just as the office of ealdorman probably evolved over time the position of reeve may have grown from an official who pursued criminals and administered penalties to the convicted, alongside overseeing the royal lands, to one of the men who judged the local court cases. The reeve's duties may have included acting as a judge all along or the later Anglo-Saxon kings may have added these functions as a way of keeping a royal presence in the increasingly large areas controlled by ealdormen. The complete lack of detail for the earliest development of the reeve, however, has made it impossible to say anything

¹⁵⁴ Keynes, 'Fonthill Letter', p. 80.

¹⁵⁵ Keynes, 'Fonthill Letter', p. 80. While there is no indication the author questions the reeve's authority, there may be some indication that Ordlaſ thought the reeve was a bit hasty in his confiscation of the Helmstan's lands.

¹⁵⁶ VI As, 8.2.

¹⁵⁷ VI Æthelstan 8.3.

with absolute certainty. I think the extant documents offer enough glimpses of reeves in the tenth and eleventh centuries, however, that we can intelligently guess what functions they performed before the appearance of the post-Conquest sheriffs with all their duties.¹⁵⁸

Now that we have established what duties the king wanted ealdormen, bishops and reeves to perform let us briefly examine the ‘dispute charters’ as another avenue of approach towards answering the question of what these three types of royal agents may actually have been doing in their official capacity. The records of land disputes documented in royal charters and house chronicles such as the *Liber Eliensis* and the *Liber Benefactorum* of Ramsey Abbey reveal an interesting pattern when placed in juxtaposition with the information provided in the Old English law-code corpus. Ealdormen appear much more often as judges and overseers of cases than do bishops and reeves. The ecclesiastical nature (and relatively late date) of these surviving sources must be kept in mind, as it may cause a skewed perspective since, particularly in the house chronicles, the clergy were often a claimant in the lawsuits. Understandably, therefore, a bishop (or abbot) could not be both judge and personally involved in the case.¹⁵⁹ The disputes which appear in charters compliment those cases recorded in the later house chronicles. Royal charters documented cases which often appeared before the royal assemblies and do not necessarily reveal much about the hundred or shire meetings

¹⁵⁸ Judith Green has written a book *English Sheriffs to 1154* but it is quite a small volume and has little to offer in commentary on pre-Conquest sheriffs or reeves. While she does provide some insights into possible reeves and briefly discusses the first identifiable sheriff, Wulfsgie the priest, in the Anglo-Saxon period they are really used more to provide a background for her main focus which is the office of the post-Conquest sheriff.

¹⁵⁹ This could work the other way as well if an ealdorman was a claimant. The *Liber Eliensis* records the history of Hatfield (Herts) which became a disputed estate between Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester (on behalf of his foundation at Ely) and Ealdorman Æthelwine and his brothers. The laymen claimed it had been forcibly taken from their father, Ealdorman Æthelstan but finally agreed to give Hatfield to the monks in exchange for lands at Hemingford, Wennington, and Yelling (Cambs). This agreement took place at Slaughter (Glos) in the presence of Ealdormen Ælfhere, Ælfric Cild, and Æthelwine as well as ‘the whole of the retinue accompanying them’ (*LE*, ii.7). Since Ealdorman Æthelwine and Bishop Æthelwold both had claims, this specific case seems to have needed similarly high-ranking judges. That it did not appear before the king, perhaps indicates that while the estate was disputed between two powerful royal agents they were able to reach a satisfactory arrangement in a comparatively short amount of time. The king may also have handed the case over to Ælfhere to oversee.

where the case originated. The house chronicles, however, especially the *Liber Eliensis* provide a more detailed view of justice at the local level and describe cases which did not make it to the king or were sent back down the judicial chain.

The charters and *Liber Eliensis* reveal that the ealdormen could have quite extensive oversight of dispute settlement. From the case between the churches of Winchcombe and Worcester over land at Upton (Glos) in the late ninth century to the quarrel concerning St Mildrith's property between Ælfstan, abbot of St Augustine's, and the priest Leofwine which occurred in the 1040s, the highest ranking lay royal agents made frequent appearances as important actors in the judicial system.¹⁶⁰ In the case of the earlier dispute, Ealdorman Æthelwulf was in charge of ensuring that the bequests in the will of King Cenwulf of Mercia (796-821) had reached their intended recipients. Cenwulf had bequeathed the land at Upton to Winchcombe stipulating it could only be held for one life but a certain Wullaf came forward claiming his father had leased the land for multiple lives from two abbesses of Winchcombe.¹⁶¹ The Mercian *witan* eventually examined the case and allowed Wullaf to keep the land although upon his death it was to revert to Worcester. While the significant men of Mercia, under the leadership of Ealdorman Æthelred, eventually issued a judgement on the matter, it seems that Æthelwulf oversaw much of the case. It was to this particular royal agent that Wullaf delivered the title-deeds which the Mercian *witan* had declared invalid due to the number of lives granted in them. The charter recording this dispute included a line which indicated that Æthelwulf ordered it to be made and given to Wullaf to replace those he had handed over.¹⁶² Thus we find, despite the fact that law-codes shed little information on the nature of the administrative duties assigned to ealdormen, evidence from charters of an ealdorman (Æthelwulf) being portrayed in a very clear light fulfilling an administrative role.

¹⁶⁰ S 1442 and S 1472.

¹⁶¹ Wullaf claimed both Cynethryth and Ælfflæd (King Cenwulf's daughter?) gave him title charters for three lives. See *PASE*, Cynethryth 4 and Ælfflæd 8.

¹⁶² S 1442: 'Aedeluulfus ei istum postea scriber praecipiebat'.

A dispute that occurred over the property of St Mildrith near the end of the Anglo-Saxon period seems to indicate little change occurred in the oversight of such matters. Leofwine the priest claimed he had bought the land from King Cnut, while Abbot Ælfstan of St Augustine's Canterbury asserted by contrast that the late king had bestowed it on the monastery. Leofwine agreed to give up his claim in return for two sulungs elsewhere until his death and an annual payment of five pounds. This particular charter is interesting for our purposes as it states in three separate places within the document that Earl Godwine made (*worhte*) the agreement between the two parties.¹⁶³ Unlike the much earlier dispute between Winchcombe and Worcester, the charter contains no mention of any sort of gathering that could be construed as an assembly, either royal or local. Indeed, except for the presence of Earl Godwine this appears to have been an ecclesiastical matter as the document lists the witnesses as Archbishop Eadsige, Bishop Siward, Earl Godwine, and the two communities of St Augustine's and Christ Church. Still, the earl appears as the active mediator among more passive ecclesiastical royal agents.

Earl Godwine did not only appear in purely ecclesiastical disputes. His name also appeared in a land dispute (also dated to the mid-1040s) between Ælfstan, bishop of Sherborne, and Care, son of Toki and his brothers. The final arrangements were made at Exeter 'before Earl Godwine and the whole shire' concerning Holcombe Rogus in Devon.¹⁶⁴ The parties reached a compromise with only one brother of Care remaining on the land which would pass to the community at Sherborne after his death. Sherborne had lost this particular estate during Æthelred's reign as recorded in Bishop Æthelric's list of complaints found in his writ to Ealdorman Æthelmær.¹⁶⁵ The history of the disputed estate can be traced back slightly further, in that Edmund Ironside leased the land from the diocese early in the eleventh century.

¹⁶³ S 1472. For full text and translation see *AS Charters*, no. 102.

¹⁶⁴ S 1474.

¹⁶⁵ S 1383. For translation see *Writs*, no 63.

Holcombe Rogus was not the only estate with a long history of one or even multiple disputes. Two charters (S 1211 and 1447) dated to the mid-tenth century reveal long-standing disputes which rival the information found in the Fonthill letter and the convoluted claims in the *Liber Eliensis*. The first charter involved the estate at Cooling, land inherited by Queen Eadgifu from her father, Sigehelm, a Kentish thegn. Sigehelm had at one point borrowed thirty pounds from another thegn, Goda, and used the Cooling estate as security for the loan. At a later date, Sigehelm repaid the loan before dying in battle. Goda refused to return the land to Eadgifu for six years until the case was brought before the local (shire?) assembly where she was ordered to prove by oath that the land was hers. She did so ‘at Aylesford in the presence of the whole assembly’.¹⁶⁶ The leaders of this local assembly went unnamed but they seemed unable or unwilling to assist Eadgifu in the recovery of her land which still remained in Goda’s hands. Finally, Eadgifu’s friends persuaded (*hire frynd fundon*) King Edward the Elder to take notice of the case.¹⁶⁷ The king eventually became so angered with Goda that he confiscated all of the thegn’s lands and gave them to Eadgifu. She returned the lands except for Cooling and two ploughlands at *Osterland* but retained hold of all the charters for the lands.

After Edward’s death, Goda approached King Æthelstan to convince the new ruler to intercede for him with Eadgifu. Æthelstan persuaded the dowager queen to return the deeds to the estates except that of *Osterland* during a royal assembly at Hamsey near Lewes. Later, when Eadwig confiscated all of his grandmother’s lands, Goda’s sons took the opportunity to obtain the Cooling and *Osterland* estates from the new king. Once he succeeded to the whole kingdom, Edgar and his *witan* returned the lands to Eadgifu who immediately donated the estates to Christ Church, Canterbury. Although no named ealdormen or bishops appear in this convoluted history that does not mean they did not

¹⁶⁶ S 1211. For text and translation with commentary see F. Harmer, *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1914), no. 23.

¹⁶⁷ Harmer, *Select English Historical Documents*, no. 23.

become involved at more than the royal assemblies. Indeed, we must wonder at the identity of Eadgifu's friends who brought the case to the attention of King Edward and have to ponder if they were powerful thegns or someone higher up the political ladder. The power of thegns, however, cannot be dismissed lightly as is also demonstrated by this case. Eadgifu, an eventual queen and mother and grandmother of kings still faced issues in obtaining and maintaining control of these estates in the face of 'determined local resistance'.¹⁶⁸

A second charter with a long-running history actually involved two estates, Send and Sunbury, about which multiple different parties made a claim on them over several years. The charter begins with the theft of a slavewoman by Æthelstan of Sunbury during the reign of King Eadred.¹⁶⁹ When called to clear himself, Æthelstan did not appear. Afterwards, Æthelstan returned the slavewoman and paid her owner two pounds in compensation. Earl Brihtferth, however, ordered Æthelstan to pay his wergild because of his failure to appear before the local assembly on the appointed day. Unable to pay the wergild and unwilling to allow his brother Edward to do so, Æthelstan lost the estate. After the death of Eadred, however, he resumed residence on the land until Eadwig gave it to Beornric who promptly ejected him. Æthelstan then took his case to Edgar after the kingdom split between the two royal brothers. Edgar and his Mercian councillors (*Myrcna witan*) were unsympathetic and ordered he pay his wergild as he should have done to Eadred. Æthelstan was still unable to do so and again refused to have his brother pay it resulting in its permanent loss to his family.

Edgar then gave the estate to Ealdorman Æthelstan 'to be held and granted, during his lifetime or at his death, to anyone he pleased.'¹⁷⁰ The ealdorman later sold the land to Ecgferth who then promised it to Archbishop Dunstan, if he would act as an advocate for

¹⁶⁸ L. Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871-978: Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 129.

¹⁶⁹ S 1447.

¹⁷⁰ S 1447. See *AS Charters*, no. 44 for full translation.

the layman's wife and child after Ecgferth's death. Upon Ecgferth's death, the king and his councillors declared the man's lands forfeit and gave the estate at Sunbury along with Ecgferth's land at Send to Ealdorman Ælfheah. The archbishop then offered to pay Ecgferth's wergild in order to gain control of the land but Edgar replied the money would only have been enough to buy a consecrated grave for Ecgferth and that 'I have left the whole case to Ælfheah.'¹⁷¹ After six years, Dunstan approached Ælfheah and purchased both Send and Sunbury lands 'uncontested and unopposed' thus enabling him to claim ownership. The charter ends with the rather interesting line that Dunstan now owned the lands as 'he who had the power of granting them and to whom the king had granted them, as his councillors directed gave them to him.'¹⁷²

Although more convoluted than many land disputes, this particular charter does allow us a glimpse of three ealdormen involved in the judicial process. Brihtferth appears acting at the regional level while Æthelstan and Ælfheah appear on a more national one. We get the impression that Edgar grew tired of the case and twice gave the estate to an ealdorman in order to not have to deal with it anymore. Thus, ealdormen could, and do, appear to have taken part in the judicial proceedings including issuing decisions or being placed in charge of long-contested estates. Many of the cases in the 'dispute charters' may well have first appeared before the local ealdorman and only after they somehow garnered royal attention did they appear before the king and his councillors. Indeed some disputes recorded in surviving charters appear to have remained at the local level.¹⁷³ If, a case did make it to a royal assembly, the king could make a decision, confirm a decision

¹⁷¹ *AS Charters*, no. 44: 'ic hæbbe ealla þa spæce to Ælfhege læten.'

¹⁷² S 1447. This was not the only dispute Archbishop Dunstan was involved in. See S 1458 which recorded the history of Wouldham in Kent. The archbishop had to prove the estate had been given to St Andrew's in Rochester in a will he had witnessed.

¹⁷³ This group of charters includes the two extant disputes (S 1460 and S 1462) involving Bishop Æthelstan of Hereford dated to the first quarter of the eleventh century. In the first, Æthelstan was a claimant of an estate in Worcestershire and thus appeared before the shire-meeting (*sciregemote*) at Worcester in the presence of Earls Leofwine and Hakon. The second case, rather famously was written down in the Hereford Gospels as a dispute between a son and his mother. In a rare occurrence, in both the dispute charters and house chronicles, a bishop appears as a judge in a local case. Bishop Æthelstan, alongside Earl Ranig, Edwin, the son of an ealdorman, Brynig the sheriff, and several other locally important men who were named plus 'all the thegns of Herefordshire' ('7 ealle þa þegnas on Herefordscire').

made by a local assembly, or hand the case back over to the important men at the regional level¹⁷⁴ Disputes over the estates of Sunbury and Send and the one involving Cooling demonstrate the importance of having powerful friends to intercede for a claimant or his family. While the law-codes reveal that a judicial system existed, the recorded land disputes demonstrate not only a much more active presence by ealdormen but also that the judicial system could be heavily influenced by personal relationships with important and powerful figures. This is best highlighted by turning our attention briefly to the house chronicles of Ely and Ramsey.

The *Liber Eliensis*, as discussed above, reveals that Ealdorman Æthelwine attended many shire and hundred meetings and often made decisions there in favour of Ely.¹⁷⁵ Ealdorman Byrhtnoth made less frequent appearances but also apparently issued favourable decisions. Indeed, the monks called upon Byrhtnoth for assistance when Æthelwine did not recover lands as he had promised as was clearly recorded in the case of the disputed estates at Hauxton and Newton. Eadric, the owner of the estates had left them to King Edgar on his death; the king eventually sold the land to Bishop Æthelwold for Ely. Ælfwold, the brother of Eadric, laid claim to the land and had possession of the title-deeds. The case apparently went on for many years and although Ealdorman Æthelwine ‘brought it to the attention of many witnesses’ the bishop and abbot could not obtain the deeds to the lands.¹⁷⁶ Abbot Byrhtnoth of Ely then offered the ealdorman three hides at Wangford in order that Æthelwine would exert his influence and retrieve the charters for Ely. Æthelwine took the land at Wanfgord but did not obtain the deeds. After years of litigation, the abbot approached Ealdorman Byrhtnoth on one of his visits to the monastery. The ealdorman of Essex then brokered a deal with Ælfwold who handed over

¹⁷⁴ The surviving Anglo-Saxon writs specifically give some insight into the first two options. Edward the Confessor sometimes makes a decision (*Writs*, no. 62) and other times confirms the local decision (*Writs*, no. 35) or directs the local assembly to do so (*Writs*, no. 17). Land disputes found in charters (S 1454 and S 1456) were also sometimes returned by the king to the local level with orders that the regional magnates to come to a decision. See pp. 193-94 above.

¹⁷⁵ For example see *LE*, ii.11, ii.11a, ii.12 and ii. 24.

¹⁷⁶ *LE*, ii.27.

the deeds to Hauxton and Newton in exchange for a charter relating to Ramsey and Sproughton (Essex) and thirty mancuses of gold. Thus, when one high-ranking man failed to acquire a disputed estate for the community they made use of their relationship with another to secure their claim.

The *Liber Eliensis* also reports that Æthelwine promised to settle a dispute over land at Horningsea (Cambs). In a disparaging note, the *Liber Eliensis* adds that Æthelwine's words 'had no weight to them, and his promises never came to fruition.'¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, the house chronicle reports that Siferth gave the long disputed lands at Brandon and Livermere (Suffolk) to Bishop Æthelwold 'against the will of Ealdorman Æthelwine and very many others.'¹⁷⁸ Despite these negative comments, Æthelwine did maintain a relatively favourable relationship with Ely, including eventually paying the monks for the land at Wangford—a relationship that worked to the monastery's advantage in most cases.

Ealdormen were not the only powerful figures at the local region, nor the only ones who could exert influence on court cases. During the course of the long dispute over the estate at Downham, Siflæd, the widow of the original owner, at a shire assembly at Wansford begged Bishop Æthelwold for pity for herself and her sons 'supported by the advocacy of all the prominent people there.'¹⁷⁹ The document only records the names of Æthelwine and Æthelwold but many other important men from Northamptonshire and East Anglia were also present and, much like Queen Eadgifu's anonymous friends, we can only guess at their identities and what social positions they held. Needless to say the bishop forgave the widow for her husband's and her own actions against Ely. While forgiveness in trying times is the mark of a saintly man, Æthelwold may have had no

¹⁷⁷ *LE*, ii.49.

¹⁷⁸ *LE*, ii.35.

¹⁷⁹ *LE*, ii.11.

other choice if Siflæd's local connection were significant enough to force his hand in the matter.

While ealdormen emerge as the most prominent local power-brokers they were not the only ones whom lesser landowners turned to in cases of disputed property for protection and advocacy. During the latter half of the tenth century, the men in the East Anglian region could also approach the reeve, Wulfstan of Dalham. Probably most famous for assisting Bishop Æthelwold in expelling the secular clerics from the Old Minster in Winchester (964), Wulfstan was a substantial landowner and influential royal agent in the eastern part of the kingdom.¹⁸⁰ He donated multiple estates to Ely and convinced others to do so as well.¹⁸¹ As reeve, Wulfstan also appears to have the power to call and oversee hundred assemblies.¹⁸²

In the case of the disputed land at Horningsea, which involved the theft of personal items from Thorth, son of Ealdorman Oslac and the arrest of the priest Æthelstan for the aiding and abetting the crime, Wulfstan emerges as a powerful local figure. A fellow priest and kinsman of Æthelstan gave gifts to both Wulfstan and Æthelwold to protect the arrested cleric from being put to death.¹⁸³ Æthelstan was eventually released and preceded at a later date to seize the disputed estate. When Wulfstan ordered the estate to be officially measured (something which Ealdorman Æthelwine does elsewhere in the *Liber Eliensis*),¹⁸⁴ Æthelstan realized he could not 'prevail against the bishop with his own resources' and thus commended himself to Wulfstan of Dalham, promising to sell the reeve the estate if he would support the priest against Bishop Æthelwold.¹⁸⁵ Needless

¹⁸⁰ ASC s.a. 964.

¹⁸¹ For Wulfstan donating lands and convincing another landowner to do so see *LE*, ii.18. Wulfstan also had an extensive kin network in the area, several of whom also donated land to Ely. For example see *LE*, ii.35.

¹⁸² See *LE*, ii.18 where Wulfstan is clearly calling a hundred assembly without a bishop or ealdorman and also *LE*, ii.48 which only provides the names of the reeve and one other man among 'nearly all the better people of those parts' being present. The second example is also interesting as an Æthelsige was named as Bishop Æthelwold's reeve and can be seen handing over the final payment for an estate.

¹⁸³ *LE*, ii.32.

¹⁸⁴ *LE*, ii.11.

¹⁸⁵ *LE*, ii.32.

to say, the prelate was unable to acquire the lands in question until after Wulfstan's death in the 980s. Thus, like Queen Eadgifu, Æthelwold was an extremely influential national figure (even more so than the queen) but in the face of a determined, local, and powerful thegn who had possession of the land in question, the bishop could not impose his will. The bishop and reeve do not appear to have been in opposition to each other until Æthelstan 'gave his allegiance' to Wulfstan supporting the argument that the Anglo-Saxon judicial system appears to have been heavily influenced by personal relationships. The Ely monks (via Æthelwold) found this used against them in this particular case but as we have already discussed they could also use such personal relationships to their advantage as in the case of Hauxton and Newton when Ealdorman Byrhtnoth obtained the charter-titles that Ealdorman Æthelwine had not.

Wulfstan of Dalham is not the only reeve who appears in the records of estate disputes—although he is perhaps the most significant and powerful one. Two others deserve a quick examination as they reveal that the more idealized documents were perhaps more accurate in their description of reeves' judicial duties than those of ealdormen. A Wulfsige, both priest and sheriff, appeared among the high-ranking witnesses to a dispute over the Wouldham estate in Kent between Archbishop Dunstan and Leofsunu.¹⁸⁶ Despite Dunstan having a thousand men support his oath, his opponent, Leofsunu, refused to accept it, therefore Wulfsige as the king's representative (*cinges handa*) accepted and acknowledged that the archbishop had proven his ownership.

The other instance that deserves mention occurs in the *Liber Benefactorum* of Ramsey Abbey. In a dispute over land at Swaffham (Norfolk), the case came before an assembly at Wandlebury where Ealdorman Æthelwine and Eadric, the king's reeve 'presided as judges'.¹⁸⁷ Later the author further notes that Eadric along with other

¹⁸⁶ S 1458. The other witnesses included the bishops of London and Rochester, the Christ Church community, Brihtwold of Mereworth and the men of East and West Kent.

¹⁸⁷ *Chron. Rames.* II.49.

important men gave the case their full attention. Although, this particular source is post-Conquest and could be putting more judicial responsibility on the Anglo-Saxon reeve than actually existed, the assigned duties of ealdormen and reeves overlap to the extent that such a scene seems very possible. That late Anglo-Saxon writs also point in this direction, by sometimes addressing the local ealdorman, bishop, and reeve, supports the idea that this was a plausible situation in the late Anglo-Saxon kingdom.

An examination of records documenting land-disputes in the late Anglo-Saxon period provides a better picture of judicial proceedings in reality. While, they do little to confirm that bishops acted as judges on a regular basis they do show prelates (and abbots) making use of the judicial system to secure disputed claims for themselves and their communities. The dispute charters do, however, reveal that ealdormen were more active in local judgements than a study of the law-codes alone would indicate. These documents also confirm the description of reeves' responsibilities painted by other sources. Finally, they show the importance of personal relationships to the administration of justice in tenth- and eleventh-century England. All three types of high-ranking royal agents could act as judges but they could also be approached and persuaded (often through gifts) to be advocates or protectors of those of lesser social and economic status, as Ordlafe did for Helmstan in the Fonthill case. Thus, the ideal presented in royally issued documents is not inaccurate; it is, if anything, oversimplified in that it does not give a full representation of the activities of ealdormen. It also does not reveal the organic relationships and activities (such as gift-giving) which drove the local politics and communities in which the judicial system operated.

OTHER PUBLIC AFFAIRS—EALDORMEN, BISHOPS, AND REEVES

Another duty that the king may have assigned the reeve or that he shared with the local bishop involved the examination of false measurements and minting machines. II Cnut

contains strong exhortations that any reeve accused of knowingly allowing false money to be coined must prove his innocence. If he could not exculpate himself he would share the same punishment as the one who minted the money in the first place. I have not come across any mention of ealdormen receiving this type of duty but again bishops and reeves emerged, if only dimly, acting more frequently on the local level. Certain bishops also had mints in their cities.¹⁸⁸ Still, this did not necessarily mean ealdormen were unconcerned with false coins. Indeed Æthelwine's complaint includes a very generic 'and other public affairs' which may have included the checking of measuring devices.

Æthelwine's grumblings suggest that the ealdorman could not avoid these unspecified duties without giving offence. The complaint offered no further information but I would like to offer some suggestions for what they may have included for bishops and ealdormen. When attending the great assemblies, which often coincided with major feast days, prelates would likely have arranged and said the elaborate masses for holy days such as Christmas and Easter. The king likely also expected them to participate in the dedication ceremonies of important royal foundations as in 1020 when the minster at Ashingdon was consecrated or Edward the Confessor's newly rebuilt Westminster in late 1065.¹⁸⁹ While not all prelates attended assemblies on a regular basis surely the king insisted that they come if an important royal foundation or even a church with royal backing (i.e. Æthelwold's rebuilding of the Old Minster, Winchester during the tenth-century reform) was being consecrated particularly one within easy traveling distance.¹⁹⁰ On the opposite side of the coin, if a bishop had built or refounded a church or monastery on his own certainly a strong expectation was placed on the local ealdorman and reeve to attend the ceremony and the resulting feast in order not to offend their ecclesiastical

¹⁸⁸ Domesday Book records show that the archbishop of Canterbury, the bishop of Hereford, and the bishop of Winchester possessed mints. See *DB* i, 179v and 87v and *Writs*, p. 445.

¹⁸⁹ ASC C s.a. 1020 and 1065. The consecration of Ashingdon occurred at Easter while Westminster happened three days after Christmas.

¹⁹⁰ *VSÆ*, ch. 40. From the description this was a major event with the king, nine bishops, and a number of ealdormen in attendance.

counterpart. In one example a bishop and ealdorman worked together to rebuild a community.¹⁹¹ Two well-known late Anglo-Saxon foundations, Coventry and Waltham, had Earl Leofric and Earl Harold respectively as founders.¹⁹² Surely at least some communication passed between lay leaders and the bishops of the dioceses where the earls founded abbeys. The introduction of a richly endowed (or re-endowed) monastery must have at least slightly disrupted the social and economic relations of the area in terms of both shire and hundred and their ecclesiastical counterparts.¹⁹³

Furthermore on very important occasions such as the coronation of a new king it would have been politically expedient for royal agents to attend if at all possible.¹⁹⁴ While the planning of such major events probably fell to the archbishops, particularly Canterbury, ealdormen and other bishops likely attended to safeguard their positions with the new king. If Ælfric of Eynsham and Wulfstan II of York represented their contemporary clergymen, bishops and abbots spent at least some time writing to each other or occasionally meeting in person to discuss the state of ecclesiastical issues. They may have also consulted each other when issuing kingdom-wide fasting and penance.¹⁹⁵

Additionally, ealdormen and bishops may have had obligations at home which they could not avoid without giving offence. Certain holy days and customs were special within a locality and which entailed some sort of meeting or celebration; ealdormen and bishops probably experienced some pressure from local peoples to be present at such

¹⁹¹ A community of secular canons was refounded at Stow (Lincs.) by Bishop Eadnoth of Dorchester and later lavish re-endowed by Earl Leofric of Mercia. S 1478 records an agreement made between the Earl Leofric, his wife, and one of Eadnoth's successors at Dorchester, Wulfwig, concerning the lay man's endowment of the community. For translation and extensive notes on the document see *AS Charters*, no. 115.

¹⁹² For Coventry see S 1098, for details and translation see *Writs*, no. 45. For a description of Harold Godwinson's refounding of Waltham see *The Waltham Chronicle* ed. and trans. L. Watkiss and M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1994), ch. 15.

¹⁹³ For an interesting take on Anglo-Saxon episcopal and earls' piety in terms of foundation, re-foundation, and lavish endowment of late Anglo-Saxon communities see R. Fleming, P. Halpin, and M. F. Smith, 'Court and piety in late Anglo-Saxon England', *Catholic Historical Review*, 87 (2001), 569-602 (pp. 570-88).

¹⁹⁴ See VSO, iv.7 for Edgar's coronation; VSD, ch 20-21 for Eadwig's coronation; and ASC CE s.a. 1043 for Edward the Confessor's ceremony on Easter.

¹⁹⁵ As those issued to combat the renewed Viking attacks.

gatherings if the royal agents were not away at the royal court.¹⁹⁶ These activities probably ranged from attending a feast at the local cathedral to witnessing and even standing as guarantor for the will of another aristocrat.

Anglo-Saxon wills prove especially intriguing and can offer us one last insight into the aristocracy in their locality.¹⁹⁷ The grantor often appealed to the king to safeguard that his or her bequests reached their intended targets.¹⁹⁸ Yet, the king could not necessarily oversee all bequests, thus several men and women also tried to ensure the aid of a high-ranking official. The examples provided below illustrate this point. Perhaps the most famous Anglo-Saxon wills were those left by Ealdorman Ælfgar of Essex and his daughters Æthelflæd and Ælfflæd.¹⁹⁹ The will of the widowed Ælfflæd, written around the year 1000, contains the most useful example for us as it has a fascinating appeal to Ealdorman Æthelmær beseeching him to act as true friend and advocate for the widow in her lifetime and to her family's foundation at Stoke-by-Nayland after her death.²⁰⁰ Linda Tollerton suggests that this Ealdorman Æthelmær probably helped another woman. In the late tenth century, the widow of Æthelric of Bocking asked an Æthelmær to be her advocate alongside Archbishop Ælfric (who replaced the deceased Archbishop Sigeric); this may very well be the same Ealdorman Æthelmær to whom Ælfflæd appealed.²⁰¹ The case of Æthelric of Bocking was quite complicated, involving treachery and royal threats

¹⁹⁶ See M. B. Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2002), for discussion of various holy day liturgies in Anglo-Saxon England.

¹⁹⁷ See L. Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2011), especially chapter 3.

¹⁹⁸ For example, Ealdorman Ælfgar of Essex's will beseeches 'whoever may then be king, for the love of God and all his saints, that let my children do what they may, they may never set aside the will which I have declared.' For text and translation see *Wills*, no. 2.

¹⁹⁹ See S 1483, S 1494, and S 1486 respectively. For translation and commentary see *Wills*, nos. 2, 14, and 15.

²⁰⁰ *Wills*, no. 15: 'And I grant to the ealdorman Æthelmær the estate at Lawling after my death, with its produce and its men, just as it stands on condition that during my life he shall be a true friend (*fulla freod*) and advocate (*forespreca*) to me and to my men, and after my death, be a true friend and advocate of the holy foundation at Stoke'.

²⁰¹ Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making*, p. 112.

of confiscation, but it demonstrated both church and lay officials could be called upon to ensure that an aristocrat's bequests found their intended destinations.²⁰²

Not only widows sought a guarantor among royal agents. In fact, Æthelric of Bocking's original will quite blatantly asked that Bishop Ælfstan of London protect (*amundige*) his widow and the prelate himself would receive an estate called Copford.²⁰³ Not all wills, however, were as obvious in their appeals. Thurstan, an eleventh-century thegn, made one with a fascinating witness list.²⁰⁴ Unlike other extant Anglo-Saxon wills which lumped witnesses together, Thurstan's will divided them by shire. Thus the leading men in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, and Essex attested Thurstan's will; all areas in which Thurstan owned land. Both Earl Harold and Bishop Stigand top the witness list in Norfolk (the first grouping of witnesses) even though they were the contemporary earl and bishop of the entire East Anglian area. The abbots of Ely and Ramsey, the dean of Bury St Edmunds, Ælfgar, son of Earl Leofric as well two men who have been identified elsewhere as the shire-reeves for Essex and Cambridgeshire also attested.²⁰⁵ The number of witnesses and the way the scribe grouped them suggest that the will was read aloud at several shire meetings.²⁰⁶ In his will immediately after Thurstan bequeathed his heriot to the king he granted both Earl Harold and Bishop Stigand a monetary bequest. Probably, like Ælfflæd's estate gift to Ealdorman Æthelmær, Thurstan gave these grants to ensure tacitly that the other bequests were carried out if the king was unable or disinclined to oversee it.²⁰⁷ Even if the king had an interest in the case he may very well have appointed one of his royal agents to oversee the distributing of bequests and land grants within the

²⁰² For a discussion of the Æthelric of Bocking case see Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making*, pp. 70-71.

²⁰³ S 1501, for translation see *Wills*, no. 16(i).

²⁰⁴ S 1531, for translation and commentary see *Wills*, no. 31.

²⁰⁵ One of the Ordgars in the list was shire-reeve in Cambridgeshire. Leofcild was called *scirgerefa* in another document related to Thurstan. He is not assigned a shire but the majority of men present were thegns in Essex, see *Wills*, no. 30. Ælfgar's position is not named but he comes before Leofcild in the lists but is not yet given the title of 'earl' himself and therefore seems to occupy a position between earl and reeve.

²⁰⁶ Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making*, p. 127 n274.

²⁰⁷ *Wills*, no. 31. The earl and bishop both were to receive half a mark of gold (compared to the two designated for the king).

shire. Quite possibly the leaving of a gift to the highest-ranking local royal agent by a testator existed as a common practice to ensure the interest of a bishop or ealdorman in the execution of the will as written.

CONCLUSION

Royal agents had a variety of attributed functions. Bishops, in particular, performed a double role having responsibilities in both the secular and the ecclesiastical spheres. Setting aside their ecclesiastical duties, we find plentiful evidence that bishops had many of the same duties as reeves and ealdormen. If ealdormen, bishops, and reeves actually executed the duties allocated to them then the complaint of exhaustion by Ealdorman Æthelwine was plausible. All three types of office holders appeared in local military and judicial activities and represented the king in the politics of their home areas. Indeed, the law-codes, in particular, assigned very similar duties to bishops and reeves. Reeves and bishops appeared more often in judicial and administrative roles than the high-ranking ealdormen. In part this may have occurred because their positions grew out of administrative ones while ealdormen originally began as trusted advisors and military leaders. While their military and political responsibilities received attention in the surviving sources, ealdormen did not appear in any clear administrative duties. Yet, I do not think we can assume that by the end of the period they had none. The position of reeve evolved through the Anglo-Saxon age. The organization of the Church in the dioceses and parishes did as well. Ealdordoms grew from a single shire to encompass large areas of the English kingdom. To suppose that all of these changes took place while the position of ealdorman remained static is to oversimplify the position and does not make full use of the sources.

The king had control of all ealdorman, bishop and reeve appointments. That their discernible duties overlapped seems to indicate that these three agents may have been

intended to act both in cooperation and as a series of checks and balances on each other's power. Both ealdormen and bishops had interests at the national level and these would have drawn their attention away from their local regions. Bishops would have also had to oversee their ecclesiastical obligations in dioceses of varying sizes with irregular sub-diocesan structures even further limiting their time for duties assigned to them as royal agents. Royal reeves remained at the local level, although occasionally their activities such as a major military defeat may have had national repercussions. Reeves' local duties would have acted as a continual representation of royal interests, especially as ealdordoms grew larger. While the reeves may have had ambitions, they definitely appear to be coming from lower level thegnly families and thus would have had less far reaching power in contrast to ealdormen and even bishops. That being said, the fluctuating nature of Anglo-Saxon aristocratic families, discussed above, does not preclude the possibility that the kin-groups of reeves were not as socially far removed from the origins of the 'lay families' and 'church families' identified in chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis.

It does not seem too big an assumption to think that the corresponding nature of these three agents' responsibilities indicated a certain amount of stability within the administration of the late Anglo-Saxon kingdom. In other words, overlapping duties ensured their main functions on behalf of the king were performed. The survival of the kingdom even when the ruler was young, underage or even absent, as Cnut was occasionally, seems to signal that the king's agents continued on with their duties even if at times royal oversight was not constant. Even when the kingdom split as it did under Eadwig and Edgar, the ealdormen and bishops at the separate courts likely executed the same duties they would have done had the kingdom remained continually united. The repeated condemnations against royal agents found in the royally issued documents, particularly denouncements of corrupt reeves, provided evidence that the officials' duties were being performed, even if not always done in an honest fashion. This administrative

system was not overly sophisticated and would not have survived a prolonged period without a king. But the West Saxon line did put in place a system of officials throughout their expanded kingdom and through various types of extant sources we can glimpse the responsibilities assigned to ealdormen, bishops, and reeves.

Chapter 5

Military Obligations of Royal Agents

Then the king and all his councillors decreed that all the ships that were any use should be assembled at London. And the king then entrusted the expedition to the leadership of Ealdorman Ælfric and Earl Thored and Bishop Ælfstan and Bishop Æscwig, and they were to try if they could entrap the Danish army anywhere at sea.

ASC C s.a. 992

The previous chapters have shown that ealdormen and bishops were generally assigned similar duties. This final chapter will discuss whether their military obligations were also equivalent or if this was an area where royal agents' duties differed between those who occupied clerical and secular positions. Four Anglo-Saxon writers demonstrated that the idea of three societal orders existed in England at least from the ninth century onwards. In other words, there were men who fought (*bellatores*), men who prayed (*oratores*) and men who worked (*laboratores*).¹ In an attempt to answer whether the Anglo-Saxon kings required the same military obligations of their senior clergy or praying men as they did from their ealdormen or fighting men we will examine the following areas: what 'military service' meant to the Anglo-Saxons; how much of the defence of the realm was passed to late Anglo-Saxon royal agents; and what was the role of the king in the defence of his people.

To understand military service in Anglo-Saxon England we must begin with the three common burdens, mentioned in various extant charters and apparently applied to all the people. Divided into bridgework (*byrcegeweorc*), borough building or repairs

¹ The earliest use of the idea of the three orders in England is found in King Alfred's Old English translation of Boethius's *De consolazione Philosophiae*. While later English writers often retained the Latin *oratores*, *bellatores*, and *laboratores* in their texts, Alfred uses the less familiar Old English *gebedmen* (bead men), *fyrðmen* (fyrd men), and *weorcmen* (work men). See *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius De Consolacione Philosophiae*, ed. W. J. Sedgefield (Oxford, 1899), p. 40.

(*burhbot*), and army service (*fyrð*), all three of these burdens may have originated with military matters although bridgework and borough work also contributed to the economic well-being of the locality. Besides examining the system of the three common burdens, this chapter will discuss examples of local defence and compare them with surviving depictions of national protection. These occasions will allow for a better understanding of how much the king delegated military matters to his agents as well as the ruler's own role in the defence of his realm. While comparing local and national defensive activities, we will contrast acts of aggression with defensive actions.

THE THREE ORDERS IN ENGLAND—MOVING FROM THE THEORETICAL TO THE CONCRETE

The idea of the three orders as societal divisions had some currency in England in the tenth and eleventh centuries. King Alfred's translation of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* included the earliest use of the tripartite division, although the idea failed to appear again until the late tenth-century works of Abbot Ælfric, Archbishop Wulfstan II and the hagiographer known as B. The abbot employed the idea the most fully; his usage generally revolved around the place of clerics in warfare. Fredrich Prinz wrote extensively on continental examples of ecclesiastical figures involved in physical battle. Given the restriction of Canon Law, Prinz found a surprising number of militant bishops.² Far fewer concrete cases survived in English sources and those that did appear were often described in vague terms that failed to clarify the extent of their involvement in military actions. Thus it remains unclear whether English clerics may have actively participated in the recorded battle or merely watched and prayed on the side-lines. A comment by Hincmar of Rheims that English churchmen did not perform military service because of

² Prinz gathered an impressive number of continental examples see F. Prinz, *Klerus und Krieg im früheren Mittelalter: Untersuchungen zur Rolle der Kirche beim Aufbau der Königsherrschaft* (Stuttgart, 1971), particularly pp. 66-126 and F. Prinz, 'King, Clergy and War at the Time of the Carolingians', in *Saints, Scholars and Heroes. Studies in Medieval Culture in Honour of Charles W. Jones*, ed. M. H. King and W. M. Stevens (Collegeville, MN, 1979), pp. 301-29.

the poverty of Anglo-Saxon bishoprics may provide some insight into the difference in continental and English examples.³ Overall, the expectations for Frankish and English military service varied with heavier obligations placed on the wealthier continental dioceses.⁴ Hincmar, however, erred in his understanding of the English Church; the king placed certain military obligations on the whole people but he assessed them based on land ownership. Thus, English churchmen had the same military obligations as other landowners. Based on his close study of the extant pre-Conquest charters in the archive of Christ Church, Canterbury, Nicholas Brooks even ventured to suggest the possibility that King Cnut (if not earlier English kings) may have had an accurate idea or even list of how many warriors each major landowner were obligated to bring to the *fyrð*.⁵

With the English writings on the division of society into three orders one question must always be considered: did contemporary examples exist? The simple answer is yes. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* provides many instances of ealdormen appearing at the head of *fyrds* and of secular royal agents fighting and dying in battles. Furthermore, the chroniclers would note the presence and sometimes deaths of clerics in battles but remained vague on what the bishops and abbots actually did at the scene. Bishops' presence at battles were recorded far less frequently than those involving ealdormen and reeves. Probably, the majority of these clergymen acted just as the clerics at the seventh-century Battle of Chester did by standing off to the side praying for their secular counterparts to win the field.⁶ To do so would have enabled them to fight visible enemies without straying outside their vocational lines. One can even ponder if the Anglo-Saxons

³ Hincmar of Reims, *Collectio de ecclesiis et capellis* MGH Fontes juris 14, 3:119-120.

⁴ D. Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge, 2007), pp.25-27.

⁵ N. Brooks, 'The Archbishopric of Canterbury and the So-Called Introduction of Knight-Service into England', in *Anglo-Norman Studies XXXIV: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 2010*, ed. D. Bates (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2011), pp. 41-62 (p. 55). Brooks persuasively argued in the same article that Anglo-Saxon England, similar to other contemporary areas in Europe, had proto-federal structures and that it is no coincidence that the amount of armour bequeathed in Archbishop Ælfric's heriot would outfit sixty men; the same number of knights post-Conquest archbishops were expected to provide the king. For a discussion of the archbishop's will see below p. 224.

⁶ *HE*, ii.2 and *ASC* E s.a. 605.

considered it a military obligation for a bishop or abbot, to accompany the troops and aid the fighting men through their prayers.⁷ Yet the extent of senior clergymen's full military obligations remains somewhat unclear. And while the theory of a societal division between praying men and fighting men can be seen in the extant sources the reality of the Anglo-Saxon system was more complicated.

We know bishops and abbots were associated with fighting men but did senior clergymen raise local troops and lead them to a battlefield as ealdormen clearly did? Byrhtferth's *Vita Oswaldi* describes the archbishop's retinue of which some members were soldiers.⁸ Similarly, several extant documents describe Archbishop Æthelnoth's household as having both laymen and clerics—one lease lists his *milites* (with no corresponding clerics) among the witnesses.⁹ While many clergymen may have remained at a safe distance praying during an actual battle and thus never picked up a sword, as landowners, they still had responsibility for providing troops when necessary. Domesday Book records certain men commended to ealdormen, earls, or bishops. These men appeared to owe military service through oaths sworn to a royal agent in exchange for a leased estate or *lænland*.

Some of the best examples of these relationships come from the records of the diocese of Worcester. Oswald, while bishop of Worcester, wrote a letter to King Edgar, outlining how the prelate leased an estate for the traditional three lives. The bishop wrote that the leasee had to 'fulfil the whole law of riding which relates to knights' as well as a number of other things including the building of bridges, makes spears for the hunt and follow the *archiductor* who presides over the bishopric.¹⁰ Most of the leases did not

⁷ Boniface insisted that the clergy's only duty to an army was in the capacity of chaplain not to take up physical weapons. See Prinz, *Klerus und Krieg*, p. 66.

⁸ VSO, iv.16.

⁹ See S 981, 1464, and 1466. For the document which only lists the archepiscopal soldiers see S 1390.

¹⁰ See S 1368. Parts translated in S. Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007), p. 209. For further discussion of this document see P. A. Clarke, *The English Nobility under Edward the Confessor* (Oxford, 1994), p. 93 and R. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1988), pp. 152-53.

leave as explicit details about military service, but the lease of Crowle estate to Sigimund the Dane states directly that he must serve the monastery on both land and sea expeditions [*ad expeditionem terra marique*].¹¹ Similarly, Domesday records that men in possession of certain estates which composed the complex episcopal manor of Taunton (Som) were required to participate in military activities with the men of the bishop of Winchester.¹² Thus, Anglo-Saxon bishops (and abbots), despite being ‘praying men’, do appear to have been obliged to bring specific groups of men to the royal host who owed military service. The majority of senior clergymen may have passed the mustering and organization of such troops onto secular deputies (perhaps reeves) and avoided physical fighting by having the same lieutenants bodily lead the bishop or abbot’s men into battle while the ecclesiastical royal agent stayed on the side lines praying. Although he may have delegated these duties to a specific ‘fighting man’, I think we must use caution in assuming the clergyman had no interest or oversight of these activities. The distinct possibility existed that the bishop or abbot would have ridden at the head of this local levy, especially when the king called for his royal agents to bring their troops to him even if a secular deputy had technically raised the *fyrð* and would lead them into battle.

Militant Anglo-Saxon Bishops

Yet, not all surviving records use such ambiguous descriptions about the battlefield activities of Anglo-Saxon clerics. Two of Edward the Confessor’s bishops apparently led troops on military expeditions and seem to have acted in fulfilment of their martial obligations to defend their sees and raise local levies. These two activities appear quite clearly in the two Welsh marcher dioceses, Worcester and Hereford, and the activities of their bishops Ealdred and Leofgar. Ealdred controlled Worcester from 1046 to 1060 when

¹¹ *Hemingi*, I, p. 265. Sigimund was actually a *miles* of Earl Leofric of Mercia but harassed the monks of Worcester until Prior Æthelwine gave him a one life lease in return for military service.

¹² *DB*, i, 87v: ‘*in exercitum cum hominibus episcopi*’. Also see Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, pp. 157-59.

he moved to the archbishopric of York. In 1049, a combined Irish and Welsh army ravaged the areas around the Usk river. The chronicler writes that Gruffydd ap Rhydderch led the Welsh and ‘the people gathered together against him and Bishop Ealdred was there with them . . . and the others escaped with the bishop.’¹³ The *Chronicle* reported no other military skirmish while only naming a bishop the sole leader of an armed force going into battle. Usually prelates appeared in the company of a reeve or an ealdorman. Perhaps the English may not have anticipated the attack thus the local people had to move quickly and the bishop was the only royal agent who made it to the battlefield on time. That the chronicler did include the information ‘that they had too little support’ seems to support this reasoning.¹⁴ Bishop Ealdred’s martial involvement extended beyond border skirmishes and this was not the only time the sources record him as the sole named leader of an armed force.

Ealdred’s second recorded military action took place during the crisis of 1051 immediately after the king had banished the family of Godwine. The *Chronicle* reported that Edward the Confessor sent Bishop Ealdred from London to capture the outlawed Harold Godwineson “but they could not—or would not.”¹⁵ Ealdred clearly led this armed force to capture the exiled earl. The added note that the bishop may not have put forth his best effort to capture the earl may be explained by Ealdred’s apparent friendship with the Godwineson family. The bishop may have refused actually to capture Harold because of this relationship. The bishop of Worcester may have been less than diligent in giving chase but he did pursue the earl in fulfilment of his royally ordered responsibility as a king’s agent.

¹³ ASC D, s.a. 1049: ‘man gegaderade þa folc togenes þær wæs eac Ealdred biscop mid. . . 7 þa opre ætburston forð \mid/ þam biscope.’ Gruffydd ap Rhydderch was eventually defeated by Gruffydd ap Llywelyn, who became the first king of all of Wales.

¹⁴ ASC D s.a. 1049: ‘ac hi hæfdon to lytelne fultum’.

¹⁵ ASC D, s.a. 1051: ‘sende Ealdred biscop of Lunden mid genge, 7 sceoldon hine ofridan ær he to scipe come, ac hi ne mihtion—oððe hi noldon.’

While the records of Ealdred's military activities stood out, his contemporary and neighbour, Leofgar, bishop of Hereford also emerged as singular among Anglo-Saxon prelates. Elected in 1056 to replace the long-reigning incumbent, Leofgar only held office for six months but his record is worth examining. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reports that the new bishop was Earl Harold's priest and:

. . . he wore his moustaches during his priesthood until he became a bishop. He gave up his chrism and his cross and his spiritual weapons, and took his spear and his sword after his consecration as bishop, and so went campaigning against Griffith the Welsh king, and they killed him there and his priests with him, and Ælfnoth the sheriff and many good men with them; and the others fled. . . Earl Leofric came there, and Earl Harold and Bishop Ealdred, and made an agreement between them according to which Griffith swore oaths.¹⁶

While Leofgar was not the first Anglo-Saxon bishop to die during battle, he remains the sole prelate depicted as an aggressor and blatantly described as carrying weapons. This fact, however, did not necessarily mean Leogar along among Anglo-Saxon prelates possessed weapons. Indeed, many bishops, just like their secular counterparts, may have received war-gear from the king; a visible symbol of their status as one of his royal agents. The expectation being that the office-holder returned the war-gear or heriot to the king upon the agent's death.¹⁷

The wills of five bishops and one archbishop survive from the late Anglo-Saxon period spanning the years from the mid-tenth to mid-eleventh centuries.¹⁸ Four of the six left a specified heriot to the king or some form of payment which probably stood in its place.¹⁹ The will of Bishop Ælfsige of Winchester (955x958) mentioned a heriot but provides no itemized description what that entailed.²⁰ Most interesting to our discussion

¹⁶ASC C, s.a 1056: 'se werede his kenepas on his presthade oððæt he wæs biscop. Se forlet his crisman 7 his horde his gastlican wæpna 7 feng to his spere 7 to his sweorde æfter his biscuphade 7 swa for to fyrde ongean Griffin þone wyliscan cing, 7 hine man ðar ofsloh 7 his preosts mid him 7 Ælfnoð scirgerefan 7 manega gode menn mid heom, 7 ða oðre ætflugon. . . Leofric eorl com wið 7 Harald eorl 7 Ealdred bisceop 7 macedan seht þær betweenan swa þæt Griffin swor aðas.'

¹⁷ N. Brooks, 'Arms, Status and Warfare in Late-Saxon England', *British Archaeological Reports*, 59 (1978), 81-103 (pp. 85-90).

¹⁸ See *Wills*, nos. 1, 4, 18, 26, and 35 and *Crawford*, no. 10.

¹⁹ L. Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 112-113.

²⁰ *Wills*, no. 4. Whitelock suggested that this particular copy of Bishop Ælfsige's will may have been a later copy (*Wills*, pp. 181-2) while Linda Tollerton proposes the possibility that it was a draft, see Tollerton,

here Bishop Theodred of London (d. 951x953) left war-gear and Bishop Ælfwold of Crediton (d. 1011x1015) gave a warship and war-gear to the king while Archbishop Ælfric bequeathed a ship, sailing tackle and enough helmets and coats of mail for sixty men to King Æthelred II.²¹ Only the will of Æthelmær, bishop of Elmham (deposed 1070) failed to mention war-gear or payment of any sort.²² The heriots provided by these bishops and archbishop equated to the heriot of an earl or at the least a king's thegn.²³ Thus, many, if not all bishops may have possessed war-gear as a symbol of their relationship with their king, but the *Chronicle* only recorded Leofgar putting these weapons into use. Abbots and abbesses may also have owed such payments since Bishop Æthelwold forbid them from paying heriots in the *Regularis Concordia*.²⁴ Despite canon law prohibitions, other bishops may have used such weapons but the extant sources remain so vague or even silent on this detail that it seems most likely that a high percentage of Anglo-Saxon prelates never physically fought in battle. Not actually participating in a battle does not necessarily mean that the king did not place an obligation on bishops to raise troops from their dioceses and bring them either to the site of an invading army or directly to the ruler. Yet, the chroniclers' markedly different reactions to Leofgar and Ealdred's military activities point towards senior clergy being present at the battlefield or in a leadership role as acceptable. The end of the entry on Leofgar also indicates that a bishop could participate in negotiations after fighting had taken place. Bishop Stigand played a similar peace-negotiation role between the

Wills and Will-Making, p. 113 n191. Tollerton also draws attention to Boniface's gift of two shields and lances to King Æthelbald of Mercia (745x746), see Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making*, p. 215 n195.

²¹ See *Wills*, nos. 1 and 18 and *Crawford*, no. 10.

²² *Wills*, no. 35.

²³ The difference in prelates' heriots is a combination of factors. First the wealth of a diocese may have had a huge impact on the ability of a bishop to pay heriot. Secondly, there appear to have been reforms of the heriot prices during the century that these bishops left wills. The first happened under Eadred and Edgar and the second occurred under Æthelred II. Particularly under Æthelred, secular heriots increased while episcopal ones may not have. See Brooks, 'Arms, Status and Warfare', p. 88 and N. Banton, 'Ealdormen and Earls in England from the reign of King Alfred to the reign of King Aethelred II', (Thesis (D Phil), University of Oxford, 1981, 1981), p. 156.

²⁴ *The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation*, T. Symons and (London, 1953), ch. 69.

Godwineson family and the king in 1052.²⁵ Thus a bishop could negotiate between fighting men and quite possibly lead the troops raised from his estates to join the royal host but neither he nor his priests could blatantly take up physical weapons. Even in the major battles of *Assandun* and *Hastings* the clerics mentioned by the *Chronicle* do not cross this line in any recorded way.²⁶ Senior clergymen thus likely had military obligations but they did not include the picking up of a physical sword.

Finally, while the chronicler placed the blame on Leofgar's shoulders he was not the sole royal agent and therefore probably not the only leader of the expedition. Ælfnoth, the sheriff of Herefordshire, also died on this battlefield in Wales. Thus, even though the chronicler clearly depicted Leofgar's militarism the bishop did not head the local Hereford troops alone. For every other senior clergyman recorded at a battle, with the exception of Ealdred, the ecclesiastical royal agent always acted in conjunction with at least one secular leader. The uniqueness of Ealdred's situation may stem to a certain extent from some distinct characteristics of the Worcester diocese. According to the Domesday records for Worcestershire, in the hundred Oswaldslow, which consisted of 300 hides, the bishop of Worcester:

...has by a constitution of ancient times all the profits of jurisdiction [*redditiones socharum*] and all customary dues pertaining therein to the demesne support and to the king's service [*regis servitium*] and his own, so that no sheriff can have any claim there for any plea or any other cause.²⁷

In his cartulary, the monk Hemming added after sheriff 'or any exactor of royal service'.²⁸ Richard Abels has pointed out in regards to this entry that the 'exclusion of the sheriff meant that the bishop himself would have been responsible for bringing his complement of fyrd-warriors into the field.'²⁹ Therefore, because no sheriff or other royal agent, who could demand a service be rendered to the king, had any claims of authority in

²⁵ ASC E s.a. 1052.

²⁶ ASC E s.a. 1066. Abbot Leofric of Peterborough fell ill on the Hastings campaign and died soon after at his monastery. Leofric was the nephew of Earl Leofric of Mercia.

²⁷ DB i 172b.

²⁸ 'exactor regalis servitii' see Hemmingi, I, p. 287.

²⁹ Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, p. 123.

Oswaldslow, the bishop held sole responsibility for ensuring the correct number of men showed up to a national army when the levy was called up. Furthermore, Hemming's cartulary and Domesday Book both named an Eadric as the steersman of the bishop's ship—most likely the warship due in ship-soke from a grouping of 300 hides.³⁰ In addition to steering the bishop's boat [*stermannus navis episcopi*], Eadric, according to Hemming, also acted as 'the same bishop's army leader for royal service'.³¹ The apparent uniqueness of the bishop's ownership of Oswaldslow may do much to explain why Ealdred appeared as the sole leader of two separate military expeditions. Following Abels' logic, other prelates may have been able to hand over physical leadership to a local sheriff when the area needed to raise the *fyrð* but as the bishop of Worcester Ealdred had to do such things himself. Still, the existence of Eadric the steersman may indicate that Ealdred did not have to personally lead the men into battle as he had a layman to do so for him. The chroniclers however, may not have found Eadric of significant rank or family to be worth noting. Possibly, because he acted in the name of the bishop, much like other royal agents acted in the name of the king, Eadric lost some of his agency. Additionally, this position may have been relatively new or at least not well organized in the eleventh-century as only five records of men listed as 'steersman' appeared in the Domesday Book.³²

The question remains do the examples of Ealdred and Leofgar prove anything? The surviving records note the presence Anglo-Saxon bishops and abbots at various battlefields and at least some evidence shows they had both household soldiers and commended men who owed military service. But the sources remain just vague enough to leave it unclear whether any bishop, besides Ealdred and Leofgar, raised troops and led them into battle. The existence of a steersman for the bishop of Worcester may even

³⁰ For Eadric of Hindlip 'the steersman [*stirman*]' see *DB* i, 173c.

³¹ *Hemingi*, I, p. 81: '*ductor exercitus eiusdem episcopi*'.

³² See *PASE* 'steersman'.

imply that Ealdred while he appeared as the leader of two military actions, may have avoided ever taking the field himself as he probably had an appointed deputy to lead any household troops or local levy that he held responsibility for supplying. That every other bishop or abbot found at a battle site, including Leofgar, was recorded in the presence of at least one ealdorman or reeve provides a strong possibility that both types of royal agents had military obligations to attend battles very likely at the head of a local *fyrð* but only secular royal agents may have been obliged to lead these men into battle. Leofgar and even Ealdred appear to be anomalies in the English system but they do open the possibility that not all Anglo-Saxon bishops functioned exclusively as ‘praying men’ when present on a battle field. How the senior clergymen chose to fulfil their military obligations may have depended on many things including the organization of particular see, the local reeve or ealdorman, and finally the personality and background of a specific cleric.

THE COMMON BURDENS

The sparse descriptions of Anglo-Saxon battlefields can prove frustrating but the detail given to Leofgar’s expedition when compared to all other bishops and abbots found near battlefields appear to provide evidence that ealdormen and bishops for the most part acted differently on them. To try and answer this we will now our turn attention to local defensive activities. By using the lens of the three ‘common burdens’ (bridge work, borough work, and army service) this chapter will examine whether bishops and ealdormen acted differently in these settings.

As demonstrated by various charters which reserved these services for the king, the three ‘common burdens’ were placed upon the whole people and connected to the

possession of land.³³ Although ‘common’ to the whole people and often noted as a feature of the Anglo-Saxon culture, in fact, the triple burdens only started to appear in authentic Mercian charters from 749. They emerged in Kentish charters in the late eighth-century, probably through Mercian influence, and not in Wessex until the mid-ninth century.³⁴ In 749, King Æthelbald issued a charter to the Church at the Synod of Gumley, the Mercian ruler reserved services for bridgework and fortress repair.³⁵ The idea of reserving these types of services existed on the continent and may have its roots in the Theodosian code.³⁶ The reserving of *fyrð* service does not appear in an authentic charter until the late eighth century when King Offa of Mercia granted land in Gloucestershire to his minister Æthelmund.³⁷ Some scholars, such as W.H. Stevenson, argued that kings took *fyrð* service for granted and felt no need to reserve it in these earlier charters.³⁸ Richard Abels, however, has contended that service in the king’s army was a new burden added to bridgework and borough repair by King Offa. The Mercian king did so as a way to maintain his military strength in the face of the growing practice of rewarding king’s men with *bocland* rather than *lænland*.³⁹ In other words, a king leased (*læn*) an estate to his follower and that man then owed services for the land. Yet, as estates began to be permanently removed from the royal fisc and actual ownership transferred by charter (*boc*) to a royal follower it became hereditary property within a kin-group; Anglo-Saxon kings needed to maintain a way to muster a significant force. Thus, Offa added host service to the two burdens reserved by Æthelbald almost half a century before reserving three obligations that every holder of *bocland* still owed to the king no matter how long

³³ N. Brooks, 'The Development of Military Obligations in Eighth- and Ninth-Century England', in *Communities and Warfare 700-1400* (London, 2000), pp. 32-47 (p. 33).

³⁴ See Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, p. 52 and N. Brooks, 'Church, Crown and Community: Public Work and Seigneurial Responsibilities at Rochester Bridge', in *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Karl Leyser*, ed. T. Reuter (London, 1992), pp. 1-20 (p. 1).

³⁵ See S 92.

³⁶ See Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, p. 53, n60 and Brooks, 'Military Obligations', p. 69 n5.

³⁷ See S 39.

³⁸ W. H. Stevenson, 'Trinoda Necessitas', *English Historical Review*, 29 (1914), 689-702 (p. 698).

³⁹ Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, pp. 56-7 and 60.

the estate had been in the owner's family. Based on charter evidence (and supported by archaeological findings on boroughs) the idea of these three burdens spread out of Mercia and into Kent and Wessex over the next fifty years and kings made use of it, especially, to defend against the Vikings. Alfred and his descendants would continue to use the system throughout the rest of the Anglo-Saxon period.

We find several concrete examples of the triple burdens, performed singularly or jointly which offer further information about the military obligations of ecclesiastical and secular royal agents at the local level. Let us turn our attention now to the individual burdens and begin with borough repair. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in the year 893, King Alfred 'divided his army into two, so that always half its men were at home, half on service, apart from the men who guarded the boroughs.'⁴⁰ These boroughs formed a system of fortified centres organized by Alfred and continued under his children Edward the Elder and Æthelflæd as a wide-spread defence against the Vikings.⁴¹ The idea of a walled town was not new to the Anglo-Saxons as evidenced by King Æthelbald's reserving of borough work in 749 and the apparent increase in defensive fortifications around Mercian towns dated to the years following this date by archaeologists. Nor was a system of fortified centres unheard of in other parts of Europe where Charles the Bald attempted to build a similar defence in the 860s.⁴² What differed under the West Saxon royal line was the size of Alfred's project and thus probably the amount of borough work he demanded from his nobles. The extent of Alfred and his children's ambitious building scheme can best be seen from the document known as the Burghal Hidage.

⁴⁰ ASC s.a. 893.

⁴¹ A number of forts were built during the second half of Edward the Elder's reign; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that Edward or Æthelflæd ordered at least one fort to be built almost every year between 910 and 921. See ASC s.a. 910, 912, 913, 914, 915, 917, 918, 919, 920, and 921.

⁴² Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, p. 68.

The Burghal Hidage, probably compiled during Edward the Elder's reign, listed thirty-one fortified centres in the expanded West Saxon kingdom and Mercia.⁴³ Starting in the south-east the list continues in a clockwise fashion to the south-west.⁴⁴ Alfred and his children built their boroughs at military strategic locations, but not all were thriving population centres before this period. Alfred may have had difficulty in convincing the local aristocracy to fully fortify and garrison the sparsely populated and economically meagre boroughs, termed 'emergency forts' by Nicholas Brooks.⁴⁵ These smaller forts probably made up the building projects that remained unfinished or unbegun of which Asser complained in his *Life of King Alfred*, reporting that the Danes attacked incomplete forts and their building crews slaughtering the men. Asser noted that Alfred 'had much anxiety and many disputes with his own people, who would of their own free will help him with little or no labour for the general necessities of the realm.'⁴⁶ He went on to list the various groups who the king exhorted including bishops, ealdormen, thegns, and reeves before adding:

But despite his royal urging, his commands were not performed. . . fortresses, which he commanded and which have not been begun, or which, being begun too late, have not been brought to a perfect end, because the armies of the enemy broke in by land and sea, or because, as often happened, on every side, those who then opposed the commands of the king repented in vain and were ashamed when they were well-nigh desolate.⁴⁷

The necessity of defending his realm from the Vikings created such an ambitious scheme during Alfred's reign. The extent of the demand he placed on the common burdens, particularly borough service, at least according to Asser, was not well received by his

⁴³ A. Rumble, 'The Burghal Hidage as a Document', in *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications*, ed. D. Hill and A. Rumble (Manchester, 1996), pp. 69-91 (p. 90). For the most recent survey of the various theories see J. Baker and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage: Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence in the Viking Age* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 32-33.

⁴⁴ David Hill has drawn attention to the fact that it follows a similar pattern to charters in which the points of reference on the circumference of an estate are recorded. See D. Hill, 'The Burghal Hidage: The Establishment of a Text', *Medieval Archaeology*, 13 (1969), 84-92 (p. 88).

⁴⁵ See N. Brooks, 'The Administrative Background to the Burghal Hidage', in *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications*, ed. D. Hill and A. Rumble (Manchester, 1996), pp. 128-50 (p. 137).

⁴⁶ Asser, ch. 91.

⁴⁷ Asser, ch. 91.

leading men. One has to wonder if, as Asser believed, they were not fulfilling their military obligations or if they were merely initially seeing Alfred's orders as an abuse of the system of triple burdens.

The Burghal Hidage, not only listed the locations of boroughs, it also provided the hidage of each borough and one of the two extant versions supplied a formula for using these numbers to determine the size of the garrison needed. This document was probably a compilation of several documents or, at the least, reports which made use of different measuring systems to calculate the hidages of the various boroughs.⁴⁸ Nicholas Brooks argued persuasively that some of the recorded hidages may be quite small for the actual length of the medieval walls discovered in several Anglo-Saxon boroughs because Alfred and his descendants were limited by existing hidage assessments.⁴⁹ The Burghal Hidage itself may have represented a new and heavier assessment imposed by the West Saxon line in some shires in order to get this defensive system of boroughs in place.⁵⁰ Brooks concluded that while Asser's denouncement of lazy local leaders who had not built the forts in an urgent enough fashion was understandable, in turn 'it is not difficult to sympathise with those who felt that the costs [both monetary and labour lost] outweighed any likely benefit.'⁵¹ Despite their apparent reluctance during Alfred's reign, the subjects of the expanded West Saxon kingdom continued to have borough service required of them and it eventually became codified. The Grately Code issued by Alfred's grandson, Æthelstan, required that borough work be completed by a fortnight after Rogation days.⁵²

⁴⁸ Nicholas Brooks argues for at least two different systems. See Brooks, 'Administrative Background', p. 131.

⁴⁹ Brooks, 'Administrative Background', p. 131-33 and D. A. Hinton, 'The Fortifications and their Shires', in *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications*, ed. D. Hill and A. Rumble (Manchester, 1996), pp. 151-59 (pp. 153-54).

⁵⁰ Brooks, 'Administrative Background', p. 144.

⁵¹ Brooks, 'Administrative Background', p. 145.

⁵² II As 13.

King Alfred used the forts in an offensive as well as defensive manner.⁵³ The men reportedly guarding the boroughs in the annal for the year 893 were also expected to leave the borough and engage any Viking raiding party in the area. Often these borough garrisons would join the king's army or the local levy to meet the raiders. The *Chronicle's* annal for the year 914 revealed how this system worked. A Viking army under the leadership of Ohtor and Hroald in the midst of ravaging in Wales and Western England met the garrisons of several local boroughs who had gathered with the men from Hereford and Gloucester.⁵⁴

The *Chronicle* and Asser's *Life of Alfred* reveal that Alfred, Edward the Elder, and Æthelflæd all ordered various boroughs to be built or repaired and garrisoned.⁵⁵ Fortification building apparently slowed down after this, although the Grately code disclosed that the king still expected repairs even though his kingdom was no longer under urgent threat from invaders. Although built as protection in the south, the West Saxon kings viewed boroughs in northern areas as a potential danger.⁵⁶ Therefore, boroughs in the newly conquered northern lands were sometimes destroyed rather than repaired and manned by men loyal to the West Saxon line.

It seems improbable that kings oversaw each new borough they ordered built or repaired. This type of military activity would have taken place under the direction of the local high-ranking royal agent in the name of the king; only three instances recorded the leading men who arranged the building of the fortifications. A charter dated to the late ninth or early tenth century reveals that Wærferth, Bishop of Worcester, asked Ealdorman Æthelred and his wife Æthelflæd to come and fortify his city.⁵⁷ The charter provides a

⁵³ Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, p. 69.

⁵⁴ ASC s.a. 914. See PASE, Ohtor 1 and Hroald 1.

⁵⁵ ASC s.a. 919: 'Edward went with the army to Thelwall and ordered the borough to be built, occupied and manned; and while he stayed there he ordered another army, also from the people of Mercia, to occupy Manchester in Northumbria, and repair and man it.'

⁵⁶ Baker and Brookes, *Beyond Burghal Hidage*, pp. 25 and 27. While Æthelstan required borough-work in the Grately Code this did not prevent him from destroying the fortifications in York in 927. See GR, ii.6.

⁵⁷ See S 223.

unique peek into the economic means of royal agents and how they were able to fortify a city such as Worcester. It reveals that Æthelred and Æthelflæd received money from the city's inhabitants for land-rent and borough-wall as well as the fines for fighting, theft, dishonest trading and others which just go under the title 'offences which admit of compensation'.⁵⁸ The ealdorman and his wife donated half of these revenues to the bishop and cathedral community while also noting that certain fines, wagon-shilling and load-penny, belonged to the king and that the episcopal office had rights and land outside the market place.⁵⁹ Thus, we discover motivation for fortifying a city beyond following the royal orders, 'a financial carve-up between the king and the interested great lords.'⁶⁰ In this case the ealdorman of Mercia and the bishop of Worcester shared in the monetary fines and revenues. Perhaps many of the local agents could not afford to fortify a city without such recompense as well. These fortified centres housed markets and as time passed became administrative places as well thus extending royal control through the king's agents to a greater portion of the kingdom.

The ordered building of fortifications appears to have decreased in the tenth and early eleventh century as the Viking threat receded. Indeed, Edward the Elder's sons appear more often in offensive roles than do Alfred, Edward, or Æthelflæd. This did not mean that borough building or at least repairs stopped. Archaeological evidence suggests that at least Oxford and Southampton defences were redeveloped during the tenth century.⁶¹ The *Chronicle* provides the second example of a named local leader overseeing the building of defences when it records the fortification of *Medeshamstede* in 963 by Abbot Cenwulf.⁶² The abbot may have privately instigated this building. In 1055, Earl

⁵⁸ See S 223.

⁵⁹ See S 223.

⁶⁰ Brooks, 'Administrative Background', pp. 143-144.

⁶¹ Baker and Brookes, *Beyond Burghal Hidage*, p. 27. Baker and Brooks compare Æthelstan, Edmund, and Eadred more favourably to Offa's military activities than to their grandfather. See Baker and Brookes, *Beyond Burghal Hidage*, p. 28.

⁶² ASC E s.a. 963.

Harold ‘had a ditch made about the town [Hereford] during that time.’⁶³ Harold built this simple fortification after the city had been attacked by Gruffydd ap Llewelyn and its minster burnt. Hereford was not the richest of regions and one has to wonder if in this third example, the earl of Wessex paid for the new fortification out of his own pocket. No records survive to indicate if Harold had access to use the money owed by the rather incompetent local earl, Ralph the Timid for borough-work.⁶⁴

The Anglo-Saxons did not necessarily consider the triple burdens as three separate activities. Particularly borough and bridge work often appeared together, a seemingly ‘singular military and economic unit’.⁶⁵ Quite possibly the same group of labourers perform both of these burdens. Multiple charters from the 940s to the end of the period contain the phrase *pontis arcisve coaedificatione* or similar wording and direct orders from the king may have combined these two obligations.⁶⁶ In 920, Edward the Elder went to Nottingham with his army and ‘ordered to be built the borough on the south side of the river, opposite the other, and the bridge over the Trent between the two boroughs.’⁶⁷ Edward had also previously ordered boroughs built across rivers from existing centres at Hertford (913), Bedford (915), and Stamford (918).⁶⁸ John Baker and Stuart Brookes have cautioned against assuming that the Anglo-Saxon automatically built bridges between these ‘double-burghs’.⁶⁹ Still Edward may have ordered the building of bridges, and fortified ones at that, at the same time as these secondary boroughs.

⁶³ ASC C s.a. 1055.

⁶⁴ For a discussion of Harold’s wealth see A. Williams, ‘Land and Power in the Eleventh-Century: the Estates of Harold Godwinson’, *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies*, 3 (1980), 171-87 171-72; R. Fleming, *Kings and Lords in Conquest England* (Cambridge, 1991), 71ff; R. Fleming, ‘Domesday Estates of the King and the Godwines: A Study in Late Saxon Politics’, *Speculum*, 58 (1983), 987-1007 and Clarke, *English Nobility*, particularly chapter 2.

⁶⁵ Brooks, ‘Church, Crown and Community’, p. 2.

⁶⁶ See S 463, S 464, S 465, S 467, S 475, S 480, S 485, S 491, S 502, S 554, S 576, S 623, S 628, S 707, S 720, S 749, S 886, S 896, S 1017, and S 1795.

⁶⁷ ASC s.a. 920.

⁶⁸ See ASC CD s.a. 913; A s.a. 918 (915) and 921 (918).

⁶⁹ Baker and Brookes, *Beyond Burghal Hidage*, p. 153.

Bridges served both as communication and economic links between areas and provided military functions.⁷⁰ Not only did they facilitate the movement of Anglo-Saxon troops, bridges could be used to stop Viking ships and soliders.⁷¹ Nicholas Brooks compared Anglo-Saxon bridge-work to continental fortified bridges but more recent work has indicated that it was unlikely many fortified bridges appeared before the late tenth century.⁷² Only one incident in the *Chronicle* mentions the defensive aspects of a bridge. In 1016, Cnut had to move his ships around London Bridge as it was fortified against him.⁷³ Although bridges with heavy defences appear less wide-spread then originally suggested by Brooks, unfortified bridges did exist and helped facilitate troop movements, as well as movement of information (messengers) and goods. Not only did bridges, and fords, help move English armies they also marked the areas that Viking forces could use to cross the river and expedited their own raiding or conquering. Indeed many battles occurred near places ending in –ford demonstrating the military importance of river crossings.⁷⁴ Thus, while many bridges probably remained unfortified during the Anglo-Saxon period, we can perhaps see the reasoning behind the inclusion of *byrcegeweorc* alongside the more obvious military related borough work and *fyrð* service.

Of the three common burdens, bridge work remains the most difficult to determine how the Anglo-Saxon actually assigned and performed it. Two post-Conquest texts provide some insight. The Domesday Book reports that one man from every hide was summoned for the repair of the bridge over the River Dee at Chester.⁷⁵ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* also mentions bridgework in the annal for 1097. Apparently men from

⁷⁰ Baker and Brookes, *Beyond Burghal Hidage*, pp. 152-53.

⁷¹ ASC C s.a. 1016. Cnut was forced to go around a defended bridge by digging a ditch to move his ships in order to attack London.

⁷² N. Brooks, 'Medieval European Bridges: A Window onto Changing Concepts of State Power', in *Communities and Warfare 700-1400*, ed. N. Brooks (London, 2000), pp. 1-31 and Baker and Brookes, *Beyond Burghal Hidage*, pp. 154-160. Archeological remains do not support the existence of many fortified bridges before the late tenth century.

⁷³ ASC C s.a. 1016.

⁷⁴ Baker and Brookes, *Beyond Burghal Hidage*, pp. 205-6. Nicholas Brooks also emphasised the importance of defending river crossings to facilitate the movements of English troops and deter those of Viking armies. See Brooks, 'Military Obligations', p. 35.

⁷⁵ DB i, 262b.

‘many shires whose labour was due at London were hard pressed because the wall that they built around the Tower and because of the bridge that was nearly all carried away by a flood.’⁷⁶ Both documents reveal that, like borough work and *fyrð* service, bridgework made use of hidage assessment to assign the duties. Similar to borough work, bridge work and repair required one man from each hide. A single pre-Conquest document dated to the late tenth-century and preserved in a twelfth-century cartulary from the Rochester cathedral priory provided more details on the process of allotting bridgework.

The document records in both Old English and Latin versions that the bridge over the Medway at Rochester was composed of nine piers. Certain leading men, the king, and several local populations oversaw the upkeep of each of these piers with each support allocated to specific groupings of estates.⁷⁷ The bishop of Rochester held responsibility for piers 1 and 3, while the archbishop of Canterbury 5 and 9 and the king oversaw number 4. Piers 2, 6, 7, and 8 were assigned to local groups: Gillingham and Chatham, Hollingbourne, and *Howara* (Hoo) respectively. Each group of estates supplied three beams and the planks to board them over; the exception was the residents of Hoo who because they maintain both piers 7 and 8 had to bring six beams.⁷⁸ We can locate the majority of these estates within the lathe of Aylesford, a territory found in the Domesday Book still having responsibility for the repair of the Rochester Bridge, revealing that bridgework existed essentially as a ‘territorial or regional responsibility’ that in some places may have gone back to Roman bridge repairs at the same river crossings.⁷⁹ This link to the local region was further supported by the research done on the group of lands attached to each pier and the fact that not all the estates listed under the piers the archbishop repaired appeared to have belonged to the archiepiscopal see.⁸⁰ As Nicholas Brooks argued it would ‘seem that the archbishop coordinated the work on these two

⁷⁶ ASC E s.a. 1097.

⁷⁷ *AS Charters*, no. 52.

⁷⁸ *AS Charters*, no. 52.

⁷⁹ Brooks, ‘Church, Crown and Community’, pp. 15 and 17.

⁸⁰ Brooks, ‘Church, Crown and Community’, p. 6-7.

piers from groups of estates belonging to various lords. We may suppose that a reeve or a tenant of the archbishop from the first named manor [one actually in the archbishop's hands] would have had the task of overseeing the labour.'⁸¹ The estates revealed a similar pattern for pier 4, the one for which the king had responsibility. We can therefore equally assume that the king also appointed a reeve from the region—possibly even a deputy from one of his royal villis in the area—to ensure that the work was completed regularly and on time. These are, at least in part, speculations based on the available evidence but they do provide some information in addition to the *Chronicle*'s 'one man from every shire' and the Domesday Book's 'many shires whose labour was due at London'. If the details on the Rochester Bridge indicate how the system of repair allotment for the majority of Anglo-Saxon bridges functioned; not every hide had to supply a many but only those hides which made up specific estates. Although assignment of specific repair duties probably fell on the leading men of the region where a bridge existed, the magnates themselves likely did not oversee the repairs but delegated it to one of their deputies to ensure that the work was done by two weeks after Rogation Days. Because many known bridges existed in the vicinity of a fortified centre, men chosen from a bishop or ealdorman's estate probably fulfilled both burdens at the same time.

Interestingly, none of the documents which mentioned bridgework referred to the involvement of secular royal agents. One cannot help but be intrigued by the absence of a named secular leader, apart from the English king, in the Rochester text. Yet, several things may factor into the absence of ealdormen and reeves in the document. Foremost, would be the lack of an ealdorman in Kent during the majority of the tenth and eleventh centuries, although the ealdormen of Essex may have overseen this area during this time. It may also indicate the power of the bishop of Rochester and archbishop of Canterbury in the Kentish region. Finally, while I think ealdormen will have had similar responsibilities

⁸¹ Brooks, 'Church, Crown and Community', p. 7.

for bridges in other regions, ecclesiastical royal agents may have received more administrative duties in the overseeing of bridgework—and even road and borough repairs—as they may have had less obligations in terms of directly leading armed forces. Most prelates maintained their episcopal seats within fortified centres while ealdormen's primary homes existed outside of urban spaces. Did bishops have more motivation to ensure the regular performance of bridgework and borough work than their more rural based counterparts? Unfortunately, the extant sources have provided no clear answer to this question but the possibility it suggests has added nuances to the small amount of surviving information about the implementation of both bridge and borough work under royal agents.

Additionally, several prelates may have been highly involved in the defence of fortified centres. The first, recorded in the annal for 1011, relates to the Danes' capture of Canterbury. According to the chronicler, they only got inside because of the treachery of a man named, Ælfmær.⁸² Along with Archbishop Ælfheah, the Vikings captured the high-reeve Ælfweard, Abbess Leofrun, and Bishop Godwine of Rochester. That the Danes had to take the city through treachery implies Canterbury had an organized defence. The actual implementation of the urban defence, particularly the day to day specifics, probably fell primarily on the shoulders of the high reeve. Yet, given the importance of not only the city of Canterbury but also of the archbishop himself as the highest-ranking royal agent it seems quite likely that Ælfheah (and his predecessors and successors) had at least some say in the defence planning of Canterbury. Post-conquest sources record that the later eleventh-century bishop, Wulfstan of Worcester twice helped to organize the defence of his see in 1074 and 1088.⁸³ The second incident involved the defence of

⁸² ASC CDE s.a. 1011. John of Worcester added that he was the archdeacon, see JW s.a. 1011.

⁸³ Symeon of Durham s.a. 1074 and JW s.a. 1088.

Worcester city itself against the army of another bishop, Odo of Bayeux.⁸⁴ Thus, Ælfheah and other Anglo-Saxon bishops in danger from armies besieging their diocesan seat may have helped or directly administered the organization of its urban defence. Prelates likely had, therefore, a strong interest in ensuring the completion of the routine repair of their fortifications. The upkeep of bridges, likely done at the same time as borough work, would have ensured local or even national levies could come relieve a besieged borough. Finally, bridges would have aided in the economic activities of an episcopal seat as well.

An entry in the Berkshire Domesday states that every five hides needed to provide a soldier for the king's host.⁸⁵ While this reservation of *fyrð* service only mentioned attending the royal army, many of the recorded military engagements actually involved ealdormen or earls leading forces into battle, troops who could only have been their local levies. Thus, *fyrð* service was likely not as simple as the formula one man from every five hides. An examination of the men whom ealdormen and earls led into battle has indicated that service in the late Anglo-Saxon army was not necessarily a clear-cut matter. The men who made up these levies seemed to fall roughly into two groups: the household troops (*heorðwerod*) of a royal agent like Byrhtnoth in the Battle of Maldon and the local *fyrð* composed of those who owed military service.⁸⁶ As discussed earlier in this thesis, the king and his highest-ranking royal agents, both secular and ecclesiastical, travelled the kingdom with retinues. These retinues likely contained armed warriors; men who served as personal guards for the royal agent's person and valuables at home as well as when itinerant.⁸⁷ Descended from the *comitatus*, these household troops appeared as thegns and later housecarls after Cnut's reign. The housecarls in particular have been the focus of

⁸⁴ JW s.a. 1088. See also M. F. Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 68.

⁸⁵ DB i, 56c.

⁸⁶ *Battle of Maldon* l. 24.

⁸⁷ For a wide variety of examples see S. Baxter, 'The Earls of Mercia and their Commended Men in the Mid Eleventh Century', in *Anglo-Norman Studies, XXIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2000*, ed. J. Gillingham (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2001), pp. 23-46 (pp. 29-31).

considerable debate.⁸⁸ Most scholars now agree, however, that the housecarl corresponded to a royal (or earl's) thegn but had probably received better training in warfare and performed some aspects of a standing army although were in fact not one.⁸⁹ Richard Abels puts it best when he notes that Cnut did not introduce something new to England with his housecarls but rather only 'variations on existing themes'.⁹⁰ They were stipendiary troops some of whom lived with their lord in his hall while others appeared as landowners in the Domesday Book.⁹¹ Thus they had ties to both the king (to whom they owed *fyrð*-service as landowners) and to whichever lord they had sworn to follow. A situation which probably worked well until circumstances like the crisis of 1051 complicated it. Essentially, commended men of the Godwine family had to choose whether to honour their oaths to the aristocratic family or their *fyrð* obligation to the king when he sent out the call against the Godwinesons.

Most likely, the household troops of the king and earls formed the main bulk of the force that Edward the Confessor headed when he rode from Gloucester to Winchester in the company of 'Earl Leofric and Earl Godwine and Earl Siward and their retinue' in order to deprive Queen Emma of the treasury.⁹² The housecarls or thegns of the earls also probably constituted the 'small force' which the northern earls first brought to Edward the Confessor in 1051 before they realized the extent of the situation between the king and the Godwin family. The earls sent north 'and had a great army called out for the help of

⁸⁸ L. M. Larson, *The King's Household in England before the Norman Conquest* (Madison, 1904), pp. 151-71; C. W. Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions on the Eve of the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 12-19; N. J. Hooper, 'The Housecarls in England in the eleventh century', in *Anglo-Norman Warfare*, ed. S. Matthew (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1992), pp. 1-16; and J. Campbell, 'Some Agents and Agencies of the late-Anglo-Saxon State', in *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), pp. 201-26.

⁸⁹ *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England* ed. M. Lapidge et al., 2nd edn (Chichester, West Sussex, 2014) 'housecarls'. Gloucestershire Domesday book has three consecutive entries in which a royal thegn, a housecarl, and an earl's thegn are identified, see *DB* i, 164a.

⁹⁰ R. Abels, 'Household Men, Mercenaries, and Vikings in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Mercenaries and Paid Men: The Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. France (Boston, 2008), pp. 143-66 (p. 157).

⁹¹ The majority of men identified as housecarls in the Domesday Book have Scandinavian names but this may be more of a Viking heritage identifier rather than a true indication of a difference between housecarl and royal thegn. See R. Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 2012), p. 108 n303. This trend may be comparable to the use of the title 'ealdorman' instead of 'earl' for at least some of the men of this rank whom Cnut inherited from Æthelred.

⁹² *ASC* D s.a. 1043.

their liege lord'.⁹³ A final example occurred in 1054 when Earl Siward invaded Scotland with a land and naval force; the list of the dead included the earl's son, several of his housecarls and some of the king's household troops.⁹⁴ Thus, these warriors formed not just an entourage but went into battle with their lord, or in the case of the royal housecarls in 1054, at their lord's command. These men also appeared as tax-collectors and possibly acted as a garrison force.⁹⁵ Thus, they did not always necessarily perform their military obligations in the presence of their lord. When the Northumbrians revolted against Earl Tostig in 1065 they killed several of his housecarls who defended his treasury in the earl's absence.⁹⁶

Turning to Byrhtnoth at the Battle of Maldon, the poem makes it very clear that the ealdorman's *heorðwerod* were not the only English fighting men present at the battle. Rather, the make-up of Byrhtnoth's army constituted the East Saxon levy. Yet, historians disagree over which men made up this local *fyrð*. C. Warren Hollister contended that two categories of military service existed in Anglo-Saxon England: the select *fyrð* and the great *fyrð*. The first type, according to Hollister, required that each region had to supply a certain number of men on the summoning out of the levy. The great *fyrð* was a universal muster in dire emergency.⁹⁷ Richard Abels, however, has argued that only men who benefited or expected to benefit from the king had an obligation to answer when the king called for troops.⁹⁸ Thus, according to Abels, no general compulsion upon every man to

⁹³ ASC D s.a. 1051.

⁹⁴ ASC D s.a. 1054.

⁹⁵ For tax collection see ASC CD s.a. 1041. For possible garrison duty, much has been made of the Berkshire Domesday entry which discusses 15 acres near Wallingford 'where the housecarls stayed' see *DB* i, 56b. Ryan Lavelle has suggested, based on the number of men identified as housecarls holding land near London, that a similar force lived and protected the city. If our current understanding of housecarls is correct (that they are not a post-1016 innovation) then land at Wallingford and near London may have been put aside to provide for these household troops and may explain Æthelred's strong defense of London, see Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, pp. 244-45. For the importance of Wallingford as a borough, particularly its location and the number of hides assigned to it in the Burghal Hidage see Campbell, 'Some Agents and Agencies of the late-Anglo-Saxon State', p. 205 n18. For a dissenting opinion on the Wallingford entry see Hooper, 'Housecarls', p. 171.

⁹⁶ ASC CD s.a. 1065.

⁹⁷ Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions*, pp. 25-115.

⁹⁸ Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, pp. 116-132.

serve in the *fyrð* existed even in an emergency; only men with a direct obligation to the king (or men commended to these men) made up the levy.

George Molyneaux has pointed out that several extant charters include a clause to the effect that the king expected the triple burdens from all the people—in other words not just to the grantee of an estate. Molyneaux further points to two different texts which indicate the Anglo-Saxons based military service upon a certain number of hides.⁹⁹ The annal for the year 1008 when King Æthelred ordered ships to be built all over England, a warship per 310 hides and the already mentioned Berkshire Domesday entry which states that every five hides must provide a soldier for the royal *fyrð* as well as 20 shillings for his two months of service.¹⁰⁰ Neither example indicates that only the hides granted by royal charter held sole responsibility for providing ships and men. I have found Molyneaux's conclusions the most convincing: 'one could therefore maintain that the principle of general liability for military service was recognized throughout the late Anglo-Saxon period, but also hypothesize that most royal armies were probably composed predominantly of those who had received the king's patronage (or hoped to do so), plus their retinues.'¹⁰¹ Essentially Molyneaux has taken the middle ground between the two sides of the debate. The Anglo-Saxon kings seemed to have placed military service onto every free man in their kingdom and could call them out when necessary. Yet, the logistics of such an army would have been difficult. Using men personally connected to the king through bonds of lordship (royal agents and king's thegns) and the warriors who formed these individuals' household troops and networks of patronage likely proved easier and more cost effective. Undoubtedly the kings provided patronage

⁹⁹ G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), p. 81.

¹⁰⁰ ASC CDE s.a. 1008 and DB i, 56c.

¹⁰¹ Molyneaux, *Formation*, p. 82.

to and thus created stronger bonds with men in positions to supply trained soldiers.¹⁰² Most plausibly these men made up the pool from which a king chose his royal agents.

A royal agent's household troops probably had a variety of statuses from stipendiary soldier to landowner. Men could seemingly commend themselves to both secular and ecclesiastical royal agents. Not all of these men served as a consistent part of the royal agent's retinue but they did owe military service because of the oaths sworn to their commended lord who had often gifted them with a leased estate. Again, some of the best examples come from the episcopate of Oswald at Worcester. Unfortunately, we do not have similarly detailed documents for leases from secular royal agents although it seems unwise to assume that ealdormen did not have similar arrangements.

For example, the great army Earls Leofric and Siward called out in 1051, after discovering the forces they had brought too insignificant, most likely consisted of men who owed service to the earls (or who perhaps like Tostig's housecarls, had stayed behind to guard the royal agents' treasuries) and also men who were commended to the king. When the Godwinesons returned in 1052 and gathered support around them, the northern earls probably called these same men out again perhaps with a more general levy as well. These were the men who royal agents led into battle as part of the *fyrð*. Given that the majority of bishops' and earls' military activities involve defensive action, often of the locality, the royal agent's own household troops along with those neighbouring men commended to him probably formed these local levies. If nothing else, this provided a quickly organized force which the royal agent could order into motion to meet an invader. How often the royal agents made use of the more general obligation or even of those who owed service to the king through personal bonds for such defensive maneuverers remains unknown.

¹⁰² Molyneaux, *Formation*, p. 81.

All together the three common burdens, if performed on a regular basis, strengthened the security of a local region as well as created a system of defence for the whole kingdom. By the end of Edward the Elder's reign a series of fortified centres ringed the kingdom of Wessex and areas of Mercia and kings required repair work on their fortifications throughout the late Anglo-Saxon period. The upkeep of bridges also remained obligatory throughout the late Anglo-Saxon period and King Æthelstan even codified it into law. Although little evidence has survived for fortified bridges before the tenth century, these structures probably served military functions in facilitating the movement of troops and messengers. Finally, the *Chronicle* records multiple military actions in which local and larger *fyrds* were involved. These all aided in the defence of the realm but extant documents recorded offensive actions as well. What can offensive martial activities reveal about military obligations for royal agents? In order to answer this Anglo-Saxon military aggression will be compared to military defence. What distinguishes these two sets of martial activities will help clarify the role of the royal agents and of the king when leading the *fyrð*.

ACTS OF MILITARY DEFENCE AND ACTS OF MILITARY AGGRESSION

Ealdormen appeared in military capacities throughout the last two centuries of the Anglo-Saxon period. To understand the different situations that could arise, a brief survey of the major military events becomes necessary. The annal for 802 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* provides the earliest example of a royal agent involved in warfare. Ealdorman Æthelmund led the people of the Hwicce against the men of Wiltshire under the leadership of Ealdorman Weohstan; the Wiltshire army won the field but neither ealdorman survived the battle.¹⁰³ Over twenty years later in a series of battles against various other rulers, King Egbert of Wessex sent his son, the bishop of Sherborne, and

¹⁰³ ASC s.a. 802.

Ealdorman Wulfheard (possibly of Wiltshire) to Kent with an army.¹⁰⁴ These two early annals offer glimpses of what was likely the origin of the ealdorman office; men royally entrusted to oversee single shires. In addition to counselling the king, their main duty likely lay in raising and leading local levies against other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Yet, in the ninth century, the nature of the enemy changed.

In 840, Ealdorman Wulfheard fought the crews of thirty-three ships at Southampton while his fellow royal agent, Ealdorman Æthelhelm of Devon battled the Danes at Portland.¹⁰⁵ The following year the Vikings killed Ealdorman Hereberht and many other men in Romney Marsh (Kent).¹⁰⁶ Ealdormen no longer attacked their fellow Christian Anglo-Saxons in skirmishes between kingdoms. Rather they fought (and often lost) a defensive battle against Viking heathen invaders. The *Chronicle* continues to recount ealdormen leading men, fighting, and dying against the Vikings in various annals until the early tenth century.¹⁰⁷ After 903, an interesting gap occurs; ealdormen continue to appear in the *Chronicle*'s annals but not in martial leadership positions. This lack of recorded military activities persisted until Byrhtnoth at the Battle of Maldon in 991.

Numerous examples of ealdormen leading armies, making treaties and paying tributes occur in the second half of Æthelred II's reign.¹⁰⁸ One ealdorman in particular, Eadric Streona, in the last years of Æthelred's reign may even have managed to raise a semi-private army; he at least had a sizable force who apparently willingly followed him as the ealdorman switched sides multiple times between the Vikings and the English. At roughly the same time, high-reeves appeared as the leaders of Anglo-Saxon levies

¹⁰⁴ ASC s.a. 825. For this same year, the *Chronicle of Æthelweard* reports that at the battle at Ellendun 'there was killed Hun, ealdorman of the province of Somerset.' See Æthelweard, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. and trans. A. Campbell (London, 1962), iii.3.

¹⁰⁵ ASC s.a. 840.

¹⁰⁶ ASC s.a. 841.

¹⁰⁷ See ASC s.a. 845, 852, 853, 860, 871, 893, 903.

¹⁰⁸ ASC s.a. 1003, 1009, 1015, 1016, (CD).

possibly replacing ealdormen.¹⁰⁹ Nicholas Banton has pointed out that at the turn of the eleventh century several areas of Æthelred's kingdom had men performing the duties of the ealdormen without the title (i.e. Ulfcetel of East Anglia).¹¹⁰ Banton goes so far as to say that this may have been an experiment in government. Governmental trial or not ealdormen did not disappear, although their title did change under Cnut. The annals covering Edward the Confessor's reign report earls engaged in various martial activities as well as the emergence of shire-reeves or sheriffs at the heads of troops.¹¹¹ Edward's ealdormen appear quite busy in a variety of martial activities including the seizure of the royal treasury from the Queen Mother in 1043, various rebellions, and skirmishes on the Welsh and Scottish borders.¹¹²

Only the activities of Eadric Streona, and the crisis of 1051 really depicted an ealdorman or earl acting in an aggressive rather than defensive manner with locally raised troops. The actions of both Ælfgar and Tostig during their banishments are slightly different; they acted as aggressors but with non-English troops. The Welsh and Scottish marches have their own distinctive issues connected and will be explored below. That royal agents did not visibly perform military duties in the *Chronicle's* annals covering the mid-tenth century did not preclude the fact that they still partook in such activities in fulfilment of their in martial obligations.

Ealdormen as aggressors for the king—Royally led expeditions

The cessation of Viking attacks during the majority of the tenth century may partially explain the lack of named royal agents involved in military activities. Yet, two another

¹⁰⁹ ASC A s.a. 1001 mentions multiple high-reeves in a military capacity. The annals for 1004 and 1010 may fall under this category as well as the status of Ulfcetel of East Anglia remains uncertain. See ASC C s.a. 1004 and 1010.

¹¹⁰ See Banton, 'Ealdormen and Earls', p. 182.

¹¹¹ See ASC CD s.a. 1056 for Ælfnoth, sheriff of Herefordshire. For Godric, sheriff of Berkshire who died at Hastings, see J. A. Green, *English Sheriffs to 1154* (London, 1990), p. 26.

¹¹² For the seizing of royal treasury see ASC D s.a. 1043. For rebellions see ASC s.a. 1051(D), 1052(C), 1055 (D) 1058 (D). For dealings with the Welsh see ASC s.a. 1039 (C), 1049 (D), 1052, 1053 (C), 1055 (CD), 1058 (D), 1063 (DE) and Scotland see ASC CD s.a. 1054.

reasons may help clarify the disappearance of this sort of detail in the *Chronicle*'s annals. First, that the king was leading the majority of the known military expeditions. Second, when ealdormen may have led a *fyrð* without the presence of the ruler they still acted specifically in his name and thus may have lost some of their independent agency.

The reigns of Æthelstan, Edmund, and Eadred contain too many references concerning military expeditions to the North for us to assume that no royal agent, whether secular or clergy, had an obligation to participate. For example, in 927 Æthelstan claimed the kingdom of Northumbria after the death of his Scandinavian brother-in-law.¹¹³ This royally led expedition must have required a substantial army made up of various local levies likely headed by ealdormen or bishops (even if senior clerics may have had deputies). Similarly in 934, the same king went to Scotland 'with both a land force and a naval force' and then in 937 fought and won the Battle of *Brunanburh*.¹¹⁴ All three of these expeditions would have required organization and a sizable force. Particularly the two pronged attack during the Scottish expedition in 934 necessitated at least one secondary leader to command the naval force and a complex system for supplying both sets of men and to maintain communications between them.¹¹⁵ Æthelstan issued few charters near the time of these three expeditions but they do provide an idea of which royal agents may have accompanied the king to the North; the witness lists include both lay and ecclesiastical leaders.¹¹⁶ Æthelstan's two immediate successors, Edmund and Eadred, also led northern military expeditions in the 940s and 950s.¹¹⁷ These three kings appear as more involved military leaders than the majority of their predecessors and successors and thus the focus of the chroniclers automatically shifted to them. These

¹¹³ ASC s.a. 927.

¹¹⁴ ASC s.a. 934 and 937.

¹¹⁵ See S. Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven, 2011), pp. 164-67.

¹¹⁶ S 396 and 397 (926 celebrating sister's marriage to Northumbrian king); S 426 (934 after his return). Other charters claim to be from these time periods but appear to be spurious. For commentary on the authentic and forged charters of Æthelstan's reign and what they can reveal about his movements and his royal agents see Foot, *Æthelstan*, pp. 80-90.

¹¹⁷ See ASC s.a. 942, 943, 944, 945, 948, 954.

expeditions were, at least in part, acts of aggression against the northern kingdoms and therefore different from the majority of other military activities recorded under other tenth- and eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon kings. A final explanation for the lack of recorded military actions led by ealdormen may lay in the difference in the makeup of the expedition.

The northern campaigns in the mid-tenth century almost certainly consisted of men from several regions across the expanded West Saxon kingdom. Most likely these men came to the king under the leadership of their local ealdorman but it was the king who led the campaign; the army was not West Saxon or Kentish or Mercian but English or southern in its composition and goals.¹¹⁸ Not that the men from the various regions had suddenly become completely invested in the West Saxon kingdom and given up local loyalties but, rather, as opposed to the surviving records of other military engagements, these northern movements had different aims.

There was definitely something distinctive about an expedition when the king led it himself, as we can see, particularly in Æthelred II's reign. Unlike his direct predecessors, Æthelred did not hesitate to delegate military leadership to others.¹¹⁹ He may have come under attack for such actions judging by Ælfric's defence of ancient kings appointing ealdormen to lead the royal host.¹²⁰ According to Ælfric, delegating martial activities, allowed the king time for other matters involved in governing the kingdom.¹²¹ Yet, the English did at times seem more willing to fight off the Viking raiders with

¹¹⁸ The majority of times a 'national' army is discussed the king is the one leading it. Until Æthelred's reign an ealdorman leading more than his local troops was exceptional. Indeed it appears to be expected that the king lead a gathering of troops from more than one shire. Edmund Ironside was much more successful with his troops as king than as ætheling. See Banton, 'Ealdormen and Earls', pp. 19-21.

¹¹⁹ Compare ASC CD s.a. 992, 1003, and 1010.

¹²⁰ *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. J. C. Pope (London, 1967), II, no. 22.

¹²¹ *Homilies of Ælfric*, II, no. 22. For commentary see S. Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop and the Viking Raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 36 (2007), 151-220 (p. 165); P. Cavill, *Vikings: Fear and Faith in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 2001), pp. 289-91; and P. Clemoes and B. Dickens, 'The Chronology of Aelfric's Works', *Old English Newsletter*, 5 (1980), 212-47 (p. 241-42 and 244).

Æthelred present and gave up if he left the host.¹²² This importance attached to the king as the leader of the host over others extended to the æthelings. Edmund Ironside did not have much success or support militarily while his father still lived. In 1016, the ætheling twice tried to call out the army but both times the host dispersed either because King Æthelred did not join them or because he left the army.¹²³ Royal agents (and æthelings), therefore, could and were expected to lead local *fyrds*; within a royal host they may very well have acted as secondary commanders. But when the nation as a whole was called up the expectation existed that the king, even one with as bad of a military track record as Æthelred, would head the army.

Ealdormen as aggressors for the king—Royally-ordered ravaging

Not all martial activities during the tenth and eleventh centuries involved conquests, defensive actions against invaders, border skirmishes or even dealing with rebellious or treacherous royal agents. Some activities consisted of royally ordered punishment for an offense done to the king or his agents and the Anglo-Saxons may have viewed them as a form of ‘peace-keeping’ within the realm. In two separate instances King Eadred ordered Thetford ravaged in 952 while King Æthelred ‘laid waste’ the diocese Rochester in 986.¹²⁴ Concise in nature, neither annal provides much context. Eadred ordered Thetford ravaged to avenge Abbot Eadhelm’s death but who actually fulfilled the orders and to what extent remains unknown. The 986 ravaging of the diocese of Rochester emerged as distinctive in that it punished an ecclesiastical unit not a secular one and the annal’s vagueness suggests that Æthelred II may have led the ravaging himself. Why Æthelred took offence at the diocese of Rochester and whether he actually led the ravaging or like

¹²² ASC CD s.a. 999-1016 particularly annals 1000, 1003, 1006, 1009, and 1013. The events that led to the abandonment of the fleet in 1009 after Æthelred left it contrast sharply with the fierce defence of London in 1013 whose citizens ‘would not yield but resisted with full battle, because King Æthelred was inside.’

¹²³ ASC CDE s.a. 1016: ‘when the army assembled, nothing would satisfy them except that the king should be there with them’.

¹²⁴ ASC s.a. 952 and 986. Æthelred also ‘went into Cumberland and ravaged very nearly all of it’ in the year 1000 but this seems to have more to do with Viking invasions than necessarily an affront to the king’s peace. See ASC CDE s.a. 1000.

similar examples gave orders for it to be done by a royal agent remains unclear. Ealdormen, as the highest secular royal agent of an area, would probably have received the orders to do the ravaging.

A third royally-ordered ravaging occurred under King Harthcnut and involved Worcester. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* only records that Harthcnut ordered Worcestershire punished for the death of his two housecarls.¹²⁵ John of Worcester adds that ‘the king sent there Thored of the Midlanders, Leofric of the Mercians, Godwine of the West Saxons, Siward of the Northumbrinas, and Hrani of the *Magonæte*, and all the other English ealdormen and almost all his housecarls with a great army’.¹²⁶ John of Worcester’s list of high-ranking royal agents who Harthacnut ordered to ravage the shire appears excessive. Surely the local earls could have punished Worcestershire without the addition of all the ealdormen and earls and may be an exaggeration on John’s part. The new king may have used this royal order as a means of testing the loyalty of his high-ranking secular leaders as they had split five years earlier over whether to support Harthacnut or his brother Harold as king. That royal agents performed such military actions clearly in the name of the king may explain the *Chronicle* recorded no leader for the expeditions. Attacking one’s fellow Christians and underlings was not as praiseworthy of an endeavour as defending them from invaders, even when the ruler had ordered such actions.

Ealdormen as military aggressors against the king

While it did not happen regularly, ealdormen could become military aggressors against their king and by extension the realm. Eadric Streona was perhaps the most infamous of these aggressive royal agents. Appointed ealdorman of the Mercians in 1007, Eadric

¹²⁵ ASC CD s.a. 1041.

¹²⁶ JW s.a. 1041: ‘Thuri Mediterraneorum, Leofricum Merciorum, Gouuinum Westsaxonum, Siuuardum Northymbrorum, Roni Maegestensium et ceteros totius Anglie comites, omnesque ferme suos huscarlas cum magno exercitu’.

quickly became the leading secular royal agent under Æthelred.¹²⁷ As demonstrated by not only his rapid rise in charter witness lists but also the annal for the year 1012 which the chronicler writes ‘Ealdorman Eadric and all the chief councillors’, as opposed to the *king* and his councillors, gathered in London at Easter to pay tribute to Thorkel’s army.¹²⁸ While the Viking Thorkel entered Æthelred’s service after this event with a fleet of forty-five ships and remained loyal to the English king until his death in 1016, Eadric betrayed Æthelred in 1015 by seducing forty ships from the king and taking them to Cnut.¹²⁹ Eadric switched sides again in 1016 entering the service of Æthelred’s son and successor, Edmund Ironside. His return was brief as later that summer the ealdorman betrayed Edmund at the battle of *Assundun* by fleeing the field with the *Magonsæte*.¹³⁰ While Cnut acknowledged Eadric as overseer of Mercia when the new king took the throne he later ordered the ealdorman killed in 1017.

A second example of military aggression against the king occurred during the crisis of 1051. It began when Earl Godwine refused to ‘carry war into Kent’ to punish the people involved in the deadly brawl which had killed men in the retinue of the visiting Count Eustace.¹³¹ Edward the Confessor was displeased and things quickly escalated. Godwine and his sons Sweyn and Harold began to gather men from their three earldoms and the king ordered Earl Leofric of Mercia and Earl Siward of Northumbria to come to him at Gloucester with their troops.¹³² In refusing to be a military aggressor for the king, Earl Godwine quickly became a martial antagonist against Edward. As discussed above, the northern earls brought the king a small force but after they assessed the situation ‘they sent north throughout all their earldoms and had a great army called out for the help of

¹²⁷ See ASC CDE s.a. 1007 and Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LXII.

¹²⁸ Keynes, ‘An Abbot, an Archbishop’, p. 156.

¹²⁹ See ASC CD s.a. 1012 and 1015.

¹³⁰ ASC CD s.a. 1016.

¹³¹ ASC E s.a. 1051.

¹³² ASC D s.a. 1051.

their liege lord and Ralph did the same throughout his earldom.’¹³³ No fighting occurred at this point as most of the Godwineson followers abandoned the family and they were banished. Peter Clarke has noted that many of the Godwineson troops may have owed *fyrð*-service to the king; when Edward called up the ‘national’ army many of Godwinesons’ commended men would have had a conflict of loyalties.¹³⁴ The calling out of the royal host would have greatly weakened the Godwineson’s own troops and they fled the kingdom.

The Godwinesons returned from exile the next year with a number of ships. Earl Harold ravaged the boundary between Devon and Somerset and defeated an armed force of local men.¹³⁵ Earl Godwine outmanoeuvred the English fleet under the leadership of Earls Odda and Ralph and soon convinced men from Kent, Essex, Surrey, and Hastings to join his cause.¹³⁶ Eventually, the Godwinesons marched on London with the end result that Edward fully reinstated them to all their lands and offices. Although few military engagements occurred throughout the crisis Edward’s earls raised troops multiple times for both aggressive and defensive purposes. Particularly we find earls gathering men in their localities. Earl Harold met resistance in the southwest but the family had few ties this region. They had originated in the southeast where Godwine’s original earldom lay and this was where they found support among the local peoples.¹³⁷

The other exiled earls during Edward the Confessor’s reign were not as fortunate in finding support among the English and had to make use of foreign aid. Earl Ælfgar’s two banishments did not have as wide-scale effects as the Godwine family exile. They did require the intervention of Earl Harold during the mid-1050s in the Hereford area with an armed force as Earl Ralph had proven ineffective in stopping the army lead by Earl

¹³³ ASC D s.a. 1051. Version ‘E’ of the *Chronicle* only says that the northern earls came to the king and ‘a large company with them from the north’ but make no mention of Ralph.

¹³⁴ Clarke, *English Nobility*, pp. 93-4.

¹³⁵ ASC CD s.a. 1052.

¹³⁶ ASC CD s.a. 1052.

¹³⁷ A. Williams, *The World before Domesday: the English Aristocracy 900-1066* (London, 2008), p. 17.

Ælfgar and his ally King Gruffydd ap Llewellyn in 1055.¹³⁸ Yet in both 1055 and 1056, Harold appears more in the role of diplomat and was joined the second time by Earl Leofric of Mercia. Ælfgar fled to Wales again when Edward banished him a second time in 1058 and the English made no move against their Welsh neighbours until 1063—the year after Ælfgar’s death.¹³⁹ The king then sent two Godwineson brothers, Earls Harold and Tostig, with both a land and a sea force to Wales that year.¹⁴⁰ The Godwineson brothers’ invasion of Wales sounded remarkably similar to Earl Siward’s incursion of Scotland in 1054. Both expeditions were militarily aggressive actions done with the king’s knowledge if not his presence.

When Tostig left England in 1065, after Edward had removed him from the Northumbrian earldom because of a revolt of the local populace, he also returned with foreign troops.¹⁴¹ Tostig’s situation was unique among other exiled earls in that his return brought him into conflict with the new king of England, his brother Harold. Tostig also appears to have entered into a foreign ruler’s (Harald Hadrada) service, something that only Eadric Streona also explicitly did.

These incidents all involved ealdormen acting in a military aggressive manner against the kingdom. Ælfgar’s activities were limited to along the Welsh-Anglo border but the other three examples, Eadric, the crisis of 1051, and Tostig’s return under Harald

¹³⁸ Ralph, son of the count of Vexin, was Edward’s nephew and the local earl. In 1055 he tried to stop an invading army of Welsh and Irish. He apparently ordered his Anglo-Saxon soldiers to fight on horseback like the continent was starting to do. Ralph ended up fleeing the battle, gaining the nickname “the Timid” for his actions. See ASC C s.a. 1055.

¹³⁹ ASC D s.a. 1058. The alliance appears to have continued as Gruffydd married Ælfgar’s daughter. After Ælfgar’s death, Edwin, his son and heir to the Mercian earldom, brought many Welsh to Northumbria alongside his Mercians when the northern earldom revolted against Tostig. Perhaps even the absence of Edwin in the invasion of 1063 may indicate that the alliance still continued after Ælfgar’s death and therefore the new Mercian earl could not be trusted; it could also have been a sign of the continual rivalry between the Godwin and Leofric houses.

¹⁴⁰ ASC E, s.a. 1063: ‘Her for Harold eorl 7 his broðor Tostig eorl ægðer ge mid landfyde ge wid sciphere, into Brytlande 7 þet land geeodeon.’ (‘In this year Earl Harold and his brother Earl Tostig went into Wales with both a land force and a naval force and subdued the country.’) Gruffydd refused to fight head on with the English army but the earls’ ravaging of the countryside took its toll and eventually the Welsh king was killed by his own countrymen. See ASC D, s.a. 1063: ‘foron syððan to ofslogon heora cyng Griffin 7 brohton Harolde his heafod.’ (‘and then [the Welsh] went out and killed their king, Gruffydd, and brought his head to Harold’).

¹⁴¹ ASC CD s.a. 1065 and 1066.

Hardrada all affected matters on a kingdom-wide scale. They may have started out as local matters and concerns only involving the local lord's retinue but the situations quickly demanded the full local levy if not the royal *fyrð*.

Many of the examples cited above involved either the raising local troops as Leofric and Siward clearly did in 1051 or defending a local area with the men of the region like Earl Ralph attempted to do at Hereford in the 1050s.¹⁴² At all times these men were royal agents and owed loyalty and obedience to the king who was the source of their promotion to ealdorman, earl, or even reeve.¹⁴³ While powerful and, as proven from a survey of military activities, quite capable of raising armies, even personal ones, these royal agents' positions were still precarious. The king and his ealdormen especially were interdependent on each other. As the kingdom expanded, Alfred's descendants needed men to oversee royal interests throughout the realm including defence and raising of the local *fyrð*. These positions made ealdormen powerful but vulnerable as their offices could be taken away as shown particularly well in the 1050s. The ealdormen could raise private armies but they rarely did so in opposition to their king and when they did it was not a general rebellion against royal authority but the seeking to regain an office they had lost.¹⁴⁴

DEFENCE OF THE KINGDOM

As the above survey of major military activities in the late Anglo-Saxon period demonstrated, the king used royal agents in defence of the realm. Often found in their locality the king's agents could also influence events outside of their earldom or bishopric giving their activities wide-reaching effects on the realm. We have already examined Eadric Streona's treachery with his troops (most likely raised from his locality), Thorkel's

¹⁴² Compare to Ealdorman Byrhtnoth at Maldon.

¹⁴³ Williams, *World Before Domesday*, p. 24.

¹⁴⁴ Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, p. 88.

loyalty to Æthelred, and the political standoff between king and ealdorman which lead to the crisis of 1051. Two other royal agents, however, deserve mention under ‘national’ defence.

After leaving royal agents unnamed in any military expedition throughout the tenth century, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* suddenly in the annal for 991 records the death of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth at the Battle of Maldon.¹⁴⁵ This chronicler revealed the shock to the kingdom that the ealdorman of Essex’s death caused. He defended his locality at the head of the East Saxon levy but the results stunned and appear to have galvanized the kingdom. The *Chronicle* annals for the following years reported ealdormen across the kingdom raising levies and fighting in battles as well as collecting and paying tribute. Byrhtnoth’s heroic death stood in juxtaposition with the lack of leadership found in his contemporary Ealdorman Ælfric of Hampshire. Twice Æthelred placed Ælfric in positions of authority over forces larger than his local *fyrð*. In 992, Ælfric alongside Earl Thored, Bishop Ælfstan, and Bishop Æscwig oversaw the fleet at London but the Hampshire ealdorman apparently warned the enemy and then deserted the fleet.¹⁴⁶ In 1003, the king placed him at the head of a ‘great English army’ from Wiltshire and Hampshire against the Danes.¹⁴⁷ The chronicler claimed Ælfric feigned sickness right before the two forces were to meet thus betraying his troops and by implicit implication the kingdom as a whole.¹⁴⁸

In the last decade of his reign, Æthelred probably called upon the full force of the system of the triple burdens as the annals revealed the levying of multiple *fyrds* some of which travelled a fair distance requiring bridges (and roads) in good repair.¹⁴⁹ We also know that Cnut had to go around a defended bridge in 1016 and that the Danes attacked various boroughs throughout the early eleventh century. The repeated English losses

¹⁴⁵ ASC s.a. 991.

¹⁴⁶ ASC s.a. 992.

¹⁴⁷ ASC CD s.a. 1003: ‘mycele fyrde’.

¹⁴⁸ ASC CD s.a. 1003.

¹⁴⁹ See especially Edmund Ironside’s military activities in 1015 and 1016.

probably indicate that the system was not maintained in the ‘peaceful’ tenth-century as it should have been. The treachery of Eadric Streona and ineffectiveness of Ealdorman Ælfric suggest that Æthelred may very well have been ‘ill-counselled’ and could not rely on all of his royal agents to fulfil their military obligations. The fault of course may have lain with Æthelred himself as a king who could not make effective use of the tools available. After all, as king, Harold Godwineson managed to meet both Harald Hardrada and William the Conqueror with two sizeable forces in a short amount of time.

Although ealdormen reappeared in the sources as military leaders and reeves make their first appearance in such a function during the late tenth and eleventh centuries, senior clergymen are still rarely mentioned in this capacity. Besides the activities of Bishops Leofgar and Ealdred discussed above, senior clergymen only have a recorded presence on three other martial occasions: the gathering of the fleet at London in 992, the battle of *Assandun* in 1016, and the Hastings campaign in 1066.¹⁵⁰ Except for 992, when two bishops apparently shared leadership of the fleet with two ealdormen, it remained unclear what role the bishops and abbots played on these military expeditions. They may have had stronger inclinations to ensure the maintenance on bridges and boroughs. Clergymen may have had a large share in one other military activity; something which affected their locality but supported the defence of the entire kingdom.

A final military obligation placed upon royal agents and the English people as a whole appeared in the records for Æthelred’s reign, although it may have been in place before the first extant description: shipsake or the building and supplying of ships. The well-known annal for 1008 describes how Æthelred II ‘ordered that ships should be built unremittingly over all England, namely a warship from 310, and a helmet and corselet from eight hides.’¹⁵¹ The kingdom apparently finished the ships by the following year

¹⁵⁰ ASC CD s.a. 992, 1016, and DE s.a. 1066.

¹⁵¹ ASC CDE s.a. 1008.

producing the biggest fleet for an Anglo-Saxon king up to that point.¹⁵² The number 310 is unusual and because of the various differences in the versions of the *Chronicle* 300 was likely meant.¹⁵³ Because the majority of evidence for ship-soke during the Anglo-Saxon period comes from ecclesiastical sources Nicholas Banton has suggested that king intended his senior clergymen to carry this to burden.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, at first glance, this suggestion appears true. Archbishop Ælfric of Canterbury left his best ship, sailing tackle and sixty helmets and mailcoats to the king in his will and less than a decade later Bishop Ælfwold of Crediton bequeathed a sixty-four oar ship to the king.¹⁵⁵ Ramsey Abbey received a warship from Ælfhelm *polga* between 975 and 1016 (probably to fulfil its own shipsoke) while later sources reveal shipsokes associated with the see of Worcester, Pershore Abbey and the abbey of St Benet's Holme (Norfolk).¹⁵⁶ It has been suggested that the diocese of Hereford also had a convenient grouping of 300 hides for this purpose.¹⁵⁷ Finally, around the year 1000 a list was drawn up regarding estates attributed to the bishop of London. Forty-five men from thirty-two separate estates were due (presumably to the king) to serve as shipmen [*scipmen*] and once added together these estates roughly equalled 350 hides.¹⁵⁸ Yet, most extant documents came from ecclesiastical sources and we cannot, therefore, assume that senior clergymen alone carried the responsibility for providing ships.

Careful reading of the surviving sources can provide possible secular ship-sokes as well as clues pointing to an earlier establishment of shipscot than the *Chronicle*'s annal indicates. Archbishop Ælfric possessed and bequeathed two further ships to the people of

¹⁵² ASC CDE s.a. 1009.

¹⁵³ A. Williams, *Æthelred the Unready: The Ill-Counselled King* (London, 2003), p. 80.

¹⁵⁴ Banton, 'Ealdormen and Earls', p. 159.

¹⁵⁵ *Wills*, no. 18 and *Crawford*, no. 10. Archbishop Ælfric's will has been dated 1003x1004 and Bishop Ælfwold's to 1008x1012.

¹⁵⁶ For Ælfhelm's will see *Wills*, no. 13. For Worcester diocese (Oswaldslow) and Pershore Abbey, see A. Williams, 'An Introduction to the Worcestershire Domesday', in *The Worcestershire Domesday*, ed. A. Williams and R. W. H. Erskine (London, 1988), pp. 1-39 (p.17-8). For a discussion of St Benet's Holme, see Hooper, 'Observations on the Navy', pp. 210-11.

¹⁵⁷ See Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture*, p. 187 and *DB*, i, 182v.

¹⁵⁸ *AS Charters*, no. 72.

Wiltshire and Kent. Since he had already left one for the king these extra ships appear unnecessary unless in death he continued to provide for his flock by easing the burden of ship-soke¹⁵⁹ Earl Godwine gifted Edward the Confessor with a warship when he took the throne in 1042.¹⁶⁰ Scholars have also found traces of 300 hide groupings associated with several royal manors.¹⁶¹ As for a system being in place before 1008, King Edgar liked to assemble his fleet at Easter.¹⁶² Bishop Æthelric's complaint that he was 'no longer receiving the following amount of the ship-scot [*scypgesce*] which my predecessors had' indicates that one if not more his predecessors at Sherborne had received shipscot.¹⁶³ Thus this obligation for a ship (or to collect money in lieu of one) must go back at least to Æthelric's predecessor Æthelsige (970x979-991x993).¹⁶⁴ We should also remember that in 992 Æthelred gathered the fleet at London and put four royal agents in charge of it. Thus, the order to build ships in 1008 was likely not an innovation on Æthelred's part. Two possibilities have been suggested, first that Æthelred had extended the shipsokes outside of the West Saxon and Mercian heartlands or secondly, he placed a larger emphasis on not only supplying ships and men but the amour for them as well.¹⁶⁵ Both suggestions have merit and indeed the order for new ships may not have been issued for a single reason alone.

It seems most likely that bishops (and abbots) held obligations for both the land and naval defence of the kingdom alongside their secular counterparts. While the Church prohibited clerical involvement in bloodshed and Archbishop Wulfstan and Abbot Ælfric debated the finer points of this taboo it seems that unless Anglo-Saxon senior clergymen

¹⁵⁹ *AS Charters*, no. 18. Ælfric had previously been bishop of Ramsbury so his gift to the people of Wiltshire may possibly have been covering this diocese's shipscot. This does not, however, explain his gift to the people of Kent, see Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p. 83.

¹⁶⁰ F. Barlow, *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster* 2nd edn (Oxford, 1992), i.1.

¹⁶¹ For a list of various hundreds grouped in threes and associated with royal manors see Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p. 82.

¹⁶² *ASC CD* s.a. 973.

¹⁶³ *Writs*, no. 63.

¹⁶⁴ Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p. 81.

¹⁶⁵ Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, pp. 82-83.

actually picked up a weapon from their heriot and acted in an aggressive manner the English both accepted and expected their participation in military expeditions. Indeed, as important as military ability was supposedly to the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy, even the ealdormen and earls rarely appeared in the role of aggressor and not defender.

CONCLUSION

Anglo-Saxon royal agents were servants of the king and even ecclesiastical agents had functions to perform in the defence of the kingdom. Through the examination of the common burdens we have seen that both ecclesiastical and secular leaders had obligations to provide military service as landowners; by virtue of their offices they likely led the local *fyrð*. They fulfilled these responsibilities by bringing an array of stipendiary household troops and men from the locality who had commended themselves to a particular royal agent; in dire emergency they probably led a universal muster from their home region. After the ninth-century Viking invasion we rarely find a royal agent acting in the role of military aggressor. Setting aside the royally ordered ravagings, Eadric Streona's activities, and the crisis of 1051 it is only along the borders with Wales and Scotland that any Anglo-Saxon leaders with English troops act as invader and not defender.

Overall the nature of war in the late Anglo-Saxon period emerged in the narrative sources as revolving around the defence of the realm. That the kingdom existed on an island and, with the exception of Cnut, no king during this period had interest in invading other kingdoms not on the island may explain this heavy focus on protection. The defensive warfare, however, seems to have allowed Anglo-Saxon bishops and abbots to fulfil their obligations with minimal fuss and no criticism has survived of those clergymen who must have brought their soldiers to a battle. Only when Leofgar of Hereford blatantly fought on the battlefield and acted in the role of aggressor did the

records contain any indication of a negative reaction to a prelate's military activities. The existence of Eadric, the steersman and military leader of the bishop of Worcester forces, in the mid-tenth century suggests that most bishops and abbots probably attended battles but seemingly left the actual leading and fighting of men to lieutenants, either men like Eadric, a reeve from an episcopal estate, or in the late tenth and eleventh centuries perhaps the shire-reeve. This does not mean that the bishop did not himself ensure that levy contained the proper number of men or that they did not help in organizing the defence of their episcopal seats as Wulfstan did in post-Conquest Worcester. While they might have prayed during battles, fighting invisible enemies, Anglo-Saxon bishops also had a very real concern for visible enemies and the defence of their flocks.

The crisis of 1051 and its completion in 1052 perhaps best highlights both the strength and the weakness of the late Anglo-Saxon royal agent system. While Edward the Confessor could levy his thegns and weaken the rebelling earls by calling away many of the men in their armies, he still had to rely on his northern earls to produce a large enough host to force the Godwinesons to flee. Godwine's and Harold's outmanoeuvring of the royal fleet under the command of Earls Odda and Ralph demonstrates that making a man an earl did not automatically make him a good military commander. The negotiations performed by Bishop Stigand (and perhaps other clerics) between the Godwineson and royal parties show how prelates could participate in situations that could easily lead to bloodshed. The fact that bishops so often appear in the role of negotiators indicates that they were close by to begin with as it is unlikely that the warring parties waited for senior clergymen to arrive at truce talks. That Edward could outlaw an entire high-ranking family, including putting away his own wife, shows the power of the king over his royal agents. That he could not make the banishment stick when the Godwinesons came back and raised an army shows that local loyalties could be very strong even with a united kingdom and that royal agents could raise personal armies if they wanted to do so.

Finally, that Edward did not have the ability to force the Godwinesons out in 1052 when his northern earls hesitated to start a civil war shows how weak the king could be without the support of his royal agents. The king appointed his royal agents and he could take the offices back but when he endangered the safety of the kingdom, his royal agents in turn could force him to step back by refusing their full military support.

The late Anglo-Saxon kingdom appears to have organised its military affairs around the priority of defending the realm, a defence made possible by the system of obligations extracted from landowners through the common burdens. Edward's persistence against the Godwinesons and their growing number of followers put the whole system in jeopardy. Although Earl Godwine and his family won, they never tried to depose the king. While the late Anglo-Saxon government had its weaknesses (particularly in uniformity and implementation), the seemingly contentment of the family of Earl Godwine to accept the restoration of their positions and nothing more shows the stability of the system of royal agents.

Conclusion

By examining royal agents as a singular group instead of continually dividing them into laymen and clergy and then focusing on only one or the other category, this thesis has highlighted several important aspects about the men who acted within this system of appointments and the functions which they performed. Rulers in the later Anglo-Saxon period did not appoint their ealdormen and bishops from the same families. Indeed they do not appear to have had the option to do so. With few exceptions—the majority of which come from the testimony of post-Conquest writers—families who obtained ealdorman status did not place any sons about whom records survive in the Church. Conversely, few senior clergymen had lay relatives who assumed roles beyond the regional level. Interestingly – and perhaps paradoxically – a number of bishops had male relatives who also became career clerics.

Unlike their French and German contemporaries, however, neither ‘church families’ or ‘lay families’ in tenth- and eleventh-century England were able to establish dynasties of power, at least in any one specific region or episcopal see. Many factors contributed to this, but the king’s ability to appoint all of his ealdormen and bishops should be kept in mind. Certain monarchs showed a marked tendency not to select sons of the ‘old guard’ left over from their father’s or uncle’s reign. For example, while Edgar did appear to favour his foster-brothers (the sons of Æthelstan ‘Half-King’), he appointed only one of them to the rank of ealdorman. This stands in sharp contrast to his father, Edmund, who seems to have had no issue with Æthelstan ‘Half-King’ and his brothers administering the majority of his ealdordoms. The strength of certain men or families may have forced the king’s hand in appointments in some cases, as did Eadric Streona in Mercia at least in the early days of Cnut’s reign or the families of Leofwine and Godwine

during the Edward the Confessor's reign. A similar argument can be made in relation to the senior clergy posts. While English kings largely controlled episcopal appointments, the tenth-century reform seems to have created a strong expectation that sees, or at least the most important ones, would go to professed monks.

A reluctance on the part of the West Saxon royal line to appoint men from the same kin-groups as both ealdormen and senior clergymen makes sense as a way to maintain control of the system of royal agents. The apparent uninterest of families with ealdorman status (or those within reach of such a station) in providing their kings with the opportunity to make such a political move does not. The first two chapters of this thesis have highlighted that the 'lay families', particularly the five great kin-groups of the tenth and eleventh centuries, kept their sons out of the Church. The silence in the surviving charters and narrative sources can of course be a purposeful negligence in either the recording of sons who did not act on the kingdom-wide level or the placement of illegitimate children.¹ However, the trend, demonstrated by all five of these families and confirmed by those bishops with traceable family backgrounds seems strongly to indicate not a benign neglect of potential opportunity but, on the contrary, familial strategies amongst royal agents. They sought positions and political power as a kin-group through only one type of office.

No surviving sources provide a clear reason for this apparent apathy among certain families towards clerical life, but one might advance several reasons that could have contributed to this state of affairs. In his letter to Archbishop Egbert in 734, Bede complained that too many false monasteries had formed and were filled with laymen, not proper monks. Bede went on to protest that this left no room either for the building up of episcopal sees or the provision of land that the king could distribute it to young men as a

¹ The lack of any recorded illegitimate children among the secular elite is surprising. I have only found mention of one supposed bastard son of an ealdorman by William of Malmesbury. He writes that Ealdorman Æthelwold of East Anglia had an illegitimate son who was present when King Edgar had his official killed on a hunting trip in order to marry Ælfthryth. See *GR*, ii.159.3.

reward for defending the realm.² How widely known this particular complaint was beyond clerical circles remains unknown, but perhaps it introduced a psychological taboo within the English society or at least within the English Church, which prevented the encouragement of men from high-ranking secular families to become career clerics so that they may instead defend the kingdom. The effects of the Viking raids were devastating and we know they not only seriously injured the monastic culture of northern England, they also diminished lay interest in ecclesiastical careers. Asser reported that King Alfred had great difficulty in filling the monastery he had founded at Athelney and needed to import foreign monks.³ Alfred's subjects may well have viewed the defence of Wessex as a more pressing matter; a lack of role models in clerical careers may also have influenced decisions made by wider kin-groups. This uninterest seemingly continued into the tenth century when Oswald's hagiographer claims that there were no proper English monks and that secular clerics held more interest in adoring their wives than their churches.⁴ Thus, Oswald had to travel to Francia to learn proper monastic observances.

Although Alfred established a court school, many of the young men educated there may only have learned basic literacy skills and focused more on other courtly pursuits like hunting which would have honed their military abilities both of which were desirable in royal agents. Even if monasticism failed to thrive in the later ninth century, there were multiple communities of secular canons that a young man or boy could join (or be placed in) yet certain families appear to have shied away from this option. Perhaps the possibility of joining a cathedral community with the chance to become a bishop was not appealing enough. Yet, Dunstan and Æthelwold's early careers offer another option. Young men sent to the court to learn various skills and network with others in the courtly circle may not have had the aim of becoming clerics before a royal, or at least episcopal,

² *EEE*, §11.

³ Asser, ch. 92-93.

⁴ *VSO*, ii.2.

patron took interest in them. Perhaps many young men went to court with the intention of keeping both pathways open and only after they could not break into the network of secular royal agents did they consider the Church.

This period was, however, dominated by Viking raids and invasions and the reconquest of the Danelaw. While Edgar's reign may have been peaceable and allowed for a reinvigoration of English monasteries, his predecessors and successors needed men physically to defend their kingdom. The Church also needed the laity to act as their physical defenders while clerics provided the spiritual defence of the kingdom, ideas that appear in the writings of both Abbot Ælfric and Archbishop Wulfstan. Possibly, the prominence of Vikings attacks in our sources produced an overemphasis on physical defence among the English people or a division in society based on status. If a man belonged to certain types of families it was his duty (even his vocation) to physically defend the realm. To join a secular or monastic community would not be performing the function for which his family was destined. Those slightly lower down the social scale may have enjoyed greater freedom to choose either secular or clerical careers. Or, perhaps they did not, the *vitae* of Dunstan and Oswald indicate that both men were strongly encouraged if not outright pressured by their families to become clerics.

Finally on a more pragmatic and personal level, certain families may have had no interest in giving away familial lands to clerical communities when they placed sons in such a career. Partible inheritance could not sustain multiple permanent losses to the Church. Still, many of the great 'lay' families were major patrons of clerical communities so while this suggestion has merit it cannot wholly explain the lack of members of these types of families within the Church. This issue can be summed up in a simple sentence: late Anglo-Saxon senior clergymen and ealdormen were rarely related. Yet, why this occurred is more complex and probably cannot be explained by only one reason I have

just listed. Multiple factors went into this unique characteristic of the highest levels of Anglo-Saxon society.

The analysis in the last three chapters reveals that bishops and ealdormen seem to have been assigned similar duties at the ‘national’ and regional levels. The emergence of reeves further extended royal power into the localities and this third royal agent seems to have performed complimentary functions to those of ealdormen and bishops. Extant charters, writs, law-codes, and narrative sources reveal that the only apparent major difference appears in their military obligations. The assessment of the fundamental similarities in the duties assigned to these three types of royal agents points towards an inherent (or attempt at) stability in the late Anglo-Saxon administrative system—although not necessarily uniform implementation. While the system of royal agents itself appears to have been stable, the families working within it were not. The number of executions and banishments which occurred indicates these men’s positions were precarious. Royal agents were dependent upon the king for their high-ranking appointments and while they could be instruments of the royal anger, particularly the ealdormen could easily find that displeasure turned against them. It also reveals the instability and fluidity of being in the top echelons of secular power and the uncertainty this must have caused, even if it was unconscious, in the minds of the aristocracy. The structure of royal agents only truly worked when, as is described in the writings of King Alfred, Abbot Ælfric, and Archbishop Wulfstan, the men who fought and the men who prayed had a royal lord to support. Perhaps, one of the greatest achievements of the West Saxon line was convincing their aristocracy to seek these positions and continually want them. The various exiled earls who led rebellions during Edward the Confessor’s reign wanted entry back into the system, not to destroy it.

Overall, this thesis has demonstrated the overwhelming majority of late Anglo-Saxon bishops and ealdormen were not related through familial links, making concrete

what has long been suspected, but not conclusively proven given the focus on more specific studies of individuals or families. The lack of (recorded) nepotism across episcopal and secular lines provides a more nuanced understanding of the levels of aristocracy in Anglo-Saxon England. Additionally, 'church families' and 'lay families' may not have been fundamentally different in terms of social background. The differences stem from their choices concerning which path to high office they took and where on the changing wheel of fortune their families were at that particular moment. Furthermore, by offering an examination of both the identities and the functions of royal agents, we have achieved a better understanding of the late Anglo-Saxon kingdom and its administration. This approach allows the kin-groups and individuals who gained high office in tenth- and eleventh-century England to provide a clearer picture of the aristocracy, the king, and the Church as well as the relationships between all three.

My findings have opened up possibilities for several more avenues of scholarly pursuit. The identified family strategies among the late Anglo-Saxon aristocracy should be studied more thoroughly both through comparison with contemporary European societies and with post-Conquest England. This thesis has also revealed the need to examine further developing royal policy towards royal agents especially relating to families of ealdorman status and the emergence of shire-reeves. The analysis of the appointment of ealdormen to the West Saxon heartlands indicates that the majority of Anglo-Saxon kings were incredibly protective of these shires and probably even more thoughtful in their appointment of secular officials than has previously been recognised; this issue should be examined further. The wide-scale assessment of families in this thesis has also raised questions of societal restrictions, particularly what prevented a family from seeking offices in both the church and the state. There may have been a social taboo or even a familial one for certain kin-groups upon entering the Church. Additionally, my close examination of individual families shows an interesting lack of recorded illegitimate

children among the aristocracy, indeed besides a few royal bastards, there seems to be none. This absence may reveal how late Anglo-Saxon clerics regarded children born outside marriage but further research is needed on how the laity viewed illegitimacy and what this can reveal about late Anglo-Saxon family and society.

Although a few short-lived familial dynasties existed among both ealdormen and the senior clergy, there was little overlap between the two groups. This unique marker of the late Anglo-Saxon aristocracy seems to have occurred because of strategies specific to certain families. Yet, the ‘royal’ in royal agent should not be ignored. The tenth- and eleventh-century kings held the power of appointments to the system of royal agents and assigned many similar duties to his officials no matter their vocation. King Edmund supposedly told the recently disgraced young priest Dunstan ‘to look around for a post wherever he felt like, with no help from king’.⁵ The ruler controlled appointments, but that does not mean he had complete autonomy in all decisions and may have found his hand forced on occasion. Late Anglo-Saxon monarchs probably hesitated to give too much power to one family and may have avoided appointing ealdormen and bishops from the same kin-groups. Yet, these same kings may not have had an opportunity to appoint a bishop from a family of ealdorman status. The overwhelming majority of ‘lay families’ kept their sons out of the Church and, as this thesis has shown, the silence in the extant sources on this fact can no longer be passed over or ignored.

⁵ VSD, 13.6.

Bibliography

PRINTED PRIMARY SOURCES

- Ælfric, The Old English Version of the Heptateuch: Aelfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and His Preface to Genesis*, ed. S.J. Crawford (London, 1922).
- Ælfric, Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. John Collins, 2 vols, (London, 1967).
- Ælfric, Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, 4 vols (London, 1881).
- Æthelweard, The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. and trans. A. Campbell (London, 1962).
- King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. W.J. Sedgefield (Oxford, 1899).
- Alfred the Great and Other Contemporary Sources*, ed. and trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge (Harmondsworth, 1983).
- The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, Vol 3: MS A*, ed. J.M. Bately (Cambridge, 1986).
- The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, Vol 5: MS C*, ed. K.O'B. O'Keeffe (Cambridge, 2001).
- The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, Vol 6: MS D*, ed. G.P. Cubbin (Cambridge, 1996).
- The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, Vol 7: MS E*, ed. S. Irvine (Cambridge, 2004).
- The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation*, trans. D. Whitelocke, D.C. Douglas, and S.I. Tucker (London, 1961).
- Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. A.J. Robertson, 2nd edn, (Cambridge, 1956).
- Anglo-Saxon Wills*, ed. D. Whitelock (Cambridge, 1930).
- Anglo-Saxon Writs*, ed. F. Harmer, 2nd edn (Stamford, 1989).
- Asser, *Life of Alfred*, ed. W.H. Stevenson and revised D. Whitelock, *Life of King Alfred: Together with the Annals of Saint Neots erroneously ascribed to Asser* (Oxford, 1959).
- Bede, 'Epistola ad Ecgbertum Episcopum' in *Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, ed. and trans. C. Grocock and I.N. Wood (Oxford, 2013).
- Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1993).
- Byrhtferth of Ramsey, *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2009).
- Charters of St Albans. Anglo-Saxon Charters XII*, ed. J. Crick (Oxford, 2007).
- Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis*, ed. W.D. Macray (London, 1886).
- Chronicon Monasterii De Abingdon*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (London, 1858).
- Councils & Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church A.D. 871-1204*, ed. D. Whitelock, M. Brett, and C.N.L. Brooke (Oxford, 1981).
- The Crawford Collection of Early Charters and Documents Now in the Bodleian Library*, ed. and trans. A.S. Napier and W.H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1895).
- Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. N.P. Tanner, 2 vols (London, 1990).
- Domesday Book*, ed. J. Morris et al., 35 vols (Chichester, 1975-1986).
- Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. and trans. A. Campbell (Cambridge, 1998).
- English Historical Documents I, c. 500-1042*, ed. D. Whitelock, 2nd edn (London, 1979).

- The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 2011).
- The Early Charters of Wessex*, ed. H.P.R. Finberg (Leicester, 1964).
- Hemingus, *Chartularium Ecclesiae Wigorniensis*, ed. T. Hearne, 2 vols (Oxford, 1723).
- Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani: A Thomas Walsingham, Regnante Ricardo Secundo, Ejusdem Ecclesiae Praecentore, Compilata A.D. 793-1290*, ed. H.T. Riley, vol 1 (London, 1867).
- Hugh Candidus, *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus, a Monk of Peterborough* (Oxford, 1949).
- John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, ed. and trans. R.R. Darlington 2 vols, (Oxford, 1995).
- Liber Eliensis* ed. E.O. Blake (London: 1962).
- The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation*, ed. and trans. T. Symons (London, 1953).
- Symeon of Durham, *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, ed. T. Arnold, 2 vols, (London, 1882).
- The Waltham Chronicle*, ed. and trans. L. Watkiss and M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1994).
- William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, R. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1998).
- William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson, 2 vols (Oxford, 2007).
- Wulfstan of Winchester, *The Life of St Æthelwold*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1991).

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Abels, R., 'Household Men, Mercenaries, and Vikings in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Mercenaries and Paid Men: The Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. France (Boston, 2008), pp. 143-66.
- , *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1988).
- Airlie, S., 'Bonds of Power and Bonds of Association in the Court Circle of Louis the Pious', in *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious*, ed. P. Godman and R. Collins (Oxford, 1990), pp. 191-204.
- , 'The Nearly Men: Boso of Vienne and Arnulf of Bavaria', in *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations*, ed. A. Duggan (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 25-42.
- Attenborough, F., ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge, 1922).
- Baker, J., and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage: Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence in the Viking Age* Vol. 84, *History of Warfare* (Leiden, 2013).
- Barlow, F., *Edward the Confessor*, New edn, *Yale English Monarchs* (New Haven, 1997).
- , *The English Church, 1000-1066: A History of the Later Anglo-Saxon Church*, 2nd edn (London, 1979).
- , *The Feudal Kingdom of England, 1042-1216*. 5th edn, *A History of England* (London, 1999).
- , *The Godwins: The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty* (Harlow, 2002).
- , *The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1992).
- Barlow, F., and M. Biddle, *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages: An Edition and Discussion of the Winton Domesday*, *Winchester Studies* 1, ed. M. Biddle (Oxford, 1976).
- Barnwell, P., and M. Mostert, ed., *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2003).

- Barrow, J., *The Clergy in the Medieval World: Secular Clerics, Their Families and Careers in North-Western Europe C. 800-C. 1200* (Cambridge, 2015).
- , 'Demonstrative Behaviour and Political Communication in Later Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 36 (2007), 127-50.
- Bartlett, R., *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford, 1986).
- Bassett, S., 'The Administrative Landscape of the Diocese of Worcester in the Tenth Century', in *St Oswald of Worcester: Land and Influence*, ed. N. Brooks and C. Cubitt (London, 1996), pp. 147-73.
- Baxter, S., 'The Earls of Mercia and Their Commended Men in the Mid Eleventh Century', in *Anglo-Norman Studies, XXIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2000*, ed. J. Gillingham (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 23-46.
- , 'Edward the Confessor and the Succession Question', in *Edward the Confessor*, ed. R. Mortimer (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 77-118.
- , *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007).
- Bedingfield, M.B., *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2002).
- Bernhardt, J.W., *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany, c. 936-1075* (Cambridge, 1993).
- , 'On the Road Again': Kings, Roads and Accommodation in High Medieval Germany', in *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. L.G. Mitchell and C.P. Melville (Leiden, 2013), pp. 303-24.
- Blair, J., *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005).
- Bolton, T., *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century*, *The Northern World*, (Leiden, 2009).
- Bouchard, C.B., *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980-1198* (Ithaca, NY, 1987).
- , *Those of My Blood: Creating Noble Families in Medieval Francia* (Philadelphia, 2010).
- Boynton, M., and S. Reynolds, 'The Author of the Fonthill Letter', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 25 (1996), 91-95.
- Bradbury, J., *The Capetians: Kings of France, 987-1328* (London, 2007).
- Brooks, N., 'The Administrative Background to the Burghal Hidage', in *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications*, ed. D. Hill and A. Rumble (Manchester, 1996), pp. 128-50.
- , 'The Archbishopric of Canterbury and the So-Called Introduction of Knight-Service into England', in *Anglo-Norman Studies XXXIV: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 2010*, ed. D. Bates (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2011), pp. 41-62.
- , 'Church, Crown and Community: Public Work and Seigneurial Responsibilities at Rochester Bridge', in *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Karl Leyser*, ed. T. Reuter (London, 1992), pp. 1-20.
- , 'Medieval European Bridges: A Window onto Changing Concepts of State Power', in *Communities and Warfare 700-1400*, ed. N. Brooks (London, 2000), pp. 1-31.
- , 'Arms, Status and Warfare in Late-Saxon England', *British Archaeological Reports*, 59 (1978), 81-103.
- , 'The Development of Military Obligations in Eighth- and Ninth-Century England', in *Communities and Warfare 700-1400*, (London, 2000), pp. 32-47.
- , *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (Leicester, 1984).

- , 'The Fonthill Letter, Ealdorman Ordlaƿ and Anglo-Saxon Law in Practice', in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. S. Baxter, C.E. Karkov, J.L. Nelson and D. Pelteret (Farnham, 2009), pp. 301-17.
- Campbell, J., *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000).
- , 'The Church in Anglo-Saxon Towns', *Studies in Church History*, 16 (1979), 119-35.
- , 'Some Agents and Agencies of the Late-Anglo-Saxon State', in *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), pp. 201-26.
- , 'The United Kingdom of England: The Anglo-Saxon Achievement', in *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), pp. 31-54.
- Cavill, P., *Vikings: Fear and Faith in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 2001).
- Chadwick, H.M., *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions* (Cambridge, 1905).
- Clarke, P.A., *The English Nobility under Edward the Confessor* (Oxford, 1994).
- Clemoes, P. and B. Dickens, 'The Chronology of Aelfric's Works', *Old English Newsletter*, 5 (1980), 212-47.
- Constable, G., 'Monks and Canons in Carolingian Gaul: The Case of Rigrannus of Le Mans', in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History: Essays Presented to Walter Goffart*, ed. A. Murray (Toronto, 1998), pp. 320-36.
- Cronenwett, P.N., 'Ealdorman Æthelweard and His Family, ca. 935-1038', *Old English Newsletter*, 12 (1979).
- Crouch, D., *The Image of Aristocracy in Britain, 1000-1300* (London, 2005).
- Cubitt, C., *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils C.650-C.850* (Leicester, 1995).
- , 'Pastoral Care and Conciliar Canons: The Provisions of the 747 Council of Clofesho', in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), pp. 193-211.
- Deansley, M., *The Pre-Conquest Church in England* (London, 1961).
- Duby, G., *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. A. Goldhammer, (Chicago, 1980).
- Duggan, A., ed., *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King's College London, April 1995* (Woodbridge, 2002).
- , ed., *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations*. (Woodbridge, 2000).
- Dumville, D.N., *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar: Six Essays on Political, Cultural, and Ecclesiastical Revival* (Woodbridge, 1992).
- Earenfight, T., *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Basingstoke, 2013).
- , 'The House of Ordgar and the Foundation of Tavistock Abbey', *The English Historical Review*, 58 (1943), 190-201.
- Fleckenstein, J., *Die Hofkapelle Im Rahmen Der Ottonisch-Salischen Reichskirche* (Stuttgart, 1966).
- Fleming, R., 'Domesday Estates of the King and the Godwines: A Study in Late Saxon Politics', *Speculum*, 58 (1983), 987-1007.
- , *Kings and Lords in Conquest England* (Cambridge, 1991).
- , P. Halpin, and M.F. Smith, 'Court and Piety in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Catholic Historical Review*, 87 (2001), 569-602.
- Foot, S., *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven, 2011).
- , 'Anglo-Saxon Minsters: A Review of Terminology', in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), pp. 212-25.
- , *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, C. 600-900* (Cambridge, 2006).
- Franklin, M., 'The Cathedral as Parish Church. The Case of Southern England', in *Church and City, 1000-1500: Essays in Honour of Christopher Brooke*, ed. D. Abulafia, M.J. Franklin and M. Rubin (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 173-98.

- Freeman, E. A., *The History of the Norman Conquest of England*. 3rd edn, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1877).
- Gelling, M., *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992).
- Giandrea, M.F., *Episcopal Culture in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, *Anglo-Saxon Studies* (Woodbridge, 2007).
- Glenn, J., *Politics and History in the Tenth Century: The Work and World of Richer of Reims* (Cambridge, 2004).
- Godfrey, J., *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1962).
- Green, J.A., *English Sheriffs to 1154* (London, 1990).
- Gretsch, M., 'The Language of the "Fonthill Letter"', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 23 (1994), 57-102.
- Griffiths, B., *The Battle of Maldon* (Pinner, 2000).
- Halbrooks, J., 'Ælfric, the Maccabees, and the Problem of Christian Heroism', *Studies in Philology*, 106 (2009), 263-84.
- Hare, M., 'Deerhurst's Earliest Patrons: Æthelmund and Æthelric', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 130 (2012), 151-82.
- Harmer, F., *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1914).
- Hart, C.R., *The Danelaw* (London, 1992).
- , *The Hidation of Northamptonshire* (Leicester, 1970).
- , 'Aethelstan 'Half-King' and His Family', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 2 (1973), 115-44.
- , 'The Ealdordom of Essex', in *An Essex Tribute: Essays Presented to Frederick G. Emmison as a Tribute to His Life and Work for Essex History and Archives*, ed. K. Neale (London, 1987), pp. 57-84.
- Higham, N.J., 'Harold Godwinsson: The Construction of Kingship', in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. G.R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 19-34.
- Hill, D., 'The Burghal Hidage: The Establishment of a Text', *Medieval Archaeology*, 13 (1969), 84-92.
- , 'The Shiring of Mercia--Again', in *Edward the Elder, 899-924*, ed. N.J. Higham and D. Hill (London, 2001), pp. 144-59.
- , *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981).
- Hinton, D., 'The Fortifications and Their Shires', in *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications*, ed. D. Hill and A. Rumble (Manchester, 1996), pp. 151-59.
- Hollister, C.W., *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions on the Eve of the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1962).
- Hooper, N.J., 'The Housecarls in England in the Eleventh Century', in *Anglo-Norman Warfare*, ed. M. Strickland (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 1-16.
- , 'Some Observations on the Navy in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Norman Warfare*, ed. M. Strickland (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 17-27.
- Hough, C., 'Cattle-Tracking in the Fonthill Letter', *English Historical Review*, 115 (2000), 864-92.
- Insley, C., 'Assemblies and Charters in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages*, ed. P.S. Barnwell and M. Mostert (Turnhout, 2003).
- , 'The Family of Wulfric Spott: An Anglo-Saxon Marcher Dynasty?', in *The English and Their Legacy, 900-1200*, ed. D. Roffe (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 115-28.
- Jayakumar, S., 'Eadwig and Edgar: Politics, Propaganda, Faction', in *Edgar, King of the English 959-975*, ed. D. Scragg (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 83-103.
- Jost, K., ed., *Die "Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical.": Ein Werk Erzbischof Wulfstans Von York* (Bern, 1959).

- Kapelle, W.E., *The Norman Conquest of the North: The Region and Its Transformation, 1000-1135* (Chapel Hill, 1979).
- Keefer, S., 'Manuals', in *The Liturgical Books of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. R.W. Pfaff (Kalamazoo, MI, 1995), pp. 99-110.
- , 'Ut in Omnibus Honorificetur Deus: The Corsnæd Ordeal in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Hill and M. Swan (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 237-64.
- Kelly, S., 'The Bishopric of Selsey', in *Chichester Cathedral: An Historical Survey*, ed. M. Hobbs (Chichester, 1994), pp. 1-10.
- Keynes, S., 'An Abbot, an Archbishop and the Viking Raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 36 (2007), 151-220.
- , *An Atlas of Attestations in Anglo-Saxon Charters, c. 670-1066* (Cambridge, 2002).
- , 'Cnut's Earls', in *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. A. Rumble (Leicester, 1994), pp. 44-83.
- , 'Crime and Punishment in the Reign of King Æthelred the Unready', in *People and Places in Northern Europe, 500-1600: Essays in Honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer*, ed. N. Lund, P.H. Sawyer, and I.N. Wood (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 67-81.
- , *The Diplomas of King Æthelred "the Unready" (978-1016): A Study in Their Use as Historical Evidence* (Cambridge, 1980).
- , 'Edward, King of the Anglo-Saxons', in *Edward the Elder 899-924*, ed. N.J. Higham and D. Hill (London, 2001), pp. 40-66.
- , 'The Fonthill Letter', in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Korhammer (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 53-97.
- , 'Regenbald the Chancellor (Sic)', in *Anglo-Norman Studies, X: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1987*, ed. R.A. Brown (Woodbridge, 1988), pp. 185-222.
- , 'Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 226-57.
- King, V., 'Ealdred, Archbishop of York: The Worcester Years', in *Anglo-Norman Studies, XVIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1995*, ed. C. Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 123-38.
- Knowles, D., *The Monastic Order in England: A History of Its Development from the Times of St. Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 940-1216*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1963).
- Lapidge, M., J. Crook, R. Deshman, and S. Rankin, ed., *The Cult of St Swithun* (Oxford, 2003).
- Lapidge, M., J. Blair, S. Keynes, and D.G. Scragg, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 2nd edn (Chichester, 2014).
- Larson, L.M., *The King's Household in England before the Norman Conquest* (Madison, 1904).
- Lavelle, R., *Alfred's Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 2012).
- , *Royal Estates in Anglo-Saxon Wessex: Land, Politics and Family Strategies* (Oxford, 2007).
- Lawson, M.K., *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (New York, 1993).
- Layher, W., *Queenship and Voice in Medieval Northern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2010).

- Le Jan, R., 'Continuity and Change in the Tenth-Century Nobility', in *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations*, ed. A. Duggan (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 53-68.
- Leyser, K., *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries* (London, 1994).
- , *Medieval Germany and Its Neighbours, 900-1250, History Series* (London, 1982).
- Liebermann, F., *The National Assembly in the Anglo-Saxon Period* (New York, 1913).
- Locherbie-Cameron, M., 'Byrhtnoth and His Family', in *The Battle of Maldon, Ad 991*, ed. D. Scragg (Oxford, 1991), pp. 253-62.
- Loomis, D.B., 'Regnum and Sacerdotium in the Early Eleventh Century', in *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 129-46.
- Loyn, H.R., *The English Church, 940-1154* (Harlow, 2000).
- , *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England 500-1087* (London, 1984).
- Mack, K.R., 'The Stallers: Administrative Innovation in the Reign of Edward the Confessor', *Journal of Medieval History*, 12 (1986), 123-34.
- MacLean, S., *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, 2003).
- Maddicott, J., *The Origins of the English Parliament, 924-1327* (Oxford, 2012).
- Marten, L., 'Meet the Swarts: Tracing a Thegnley Family in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *The English and Their Legacy, 900-1200*, ed. D. Roffe (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 17-32.
- , 'The Shiring of East Anglia: An Alternative Hypothesis', *Historical Research*, 81 (2008), 1-27.
- Martindale, J., 'The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: A Reappraisal', *Past & Present*, 75 (1977), 5-45.
- Mason, E., *The House of Godwine: The History of a Dynasty* (London, 2004).
- Maurer, H., *Das Bistum Konstanz: Die Konstanzer Bischöfe Vom Ende Des 6. Jahrhunderts Bis 1206* (Berlin, 2003).
- McKitterick, R., 'A King on the Move: The Place of an Itinerant Court in Charlemagne's Government', in *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective*, ed. J. Duindam, T. Artan, and M. Kunt (Leiden, 2011), pp. 145-70.
- Miller, W.I., *Eye for an Eye* (Cambridge, 2006).
- Molyneaux, G., *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015).
- Mortimer, R., ed., *Edward the Confessor: The Man and the Legend* (Woodbridge, 2009).
- Mumby, J., 'The Descent of Family Land in Later Anglo-Saxon England', *Historical Research*, 84 (2011), 399-415.
- Nelson, J.L., *Charles the Bald* (London, 1992).
- , 'Dispute Settlement in Carolingian West Francia', in *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. W. Davies and P. Fouracre (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 45-64.
- , 'The Political Ideas of Alfred of Wessex', in *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. Duggan (London, 1993), pp. 125-58.
- Nightingale, J., *Monasteries and Patrons in the Gorze Reform: Lotharingia c.850-1000* (Oxford, 2001).
- Oleson, T., *The Witenagemot in the Reign of Edward the Confessor: A Study in the Constitutional History of Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford, 1955).
- Parsons, J., *Medieval Queenship* (Stroud, 1994).
- Pfaff, R.W., 'The Anglo-Saxon Bishop and His Book', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 81 (1999), 3-24.

- Pollock, F. and F.W. Maitland, *The History of English Law before the Time of Edward I*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1952).
- Powell, T.E., 'The 'Three Orders' of Society in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 23 (1994), 103-32.
- Pratt, D., *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge, 2007).
- , 'Written Law and the Communication of Authority in Tenth-Century England', in *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century*, ed. D. Rollason, C. Leyser and H. Williams (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 331-50.
- Prinz, F., 'King, Clergy and War at the Time of the Carolingians', in *Saints, Scholars and Heroes. Studies in Medieval Culture in Honour of Charles W. Jones*, ed. M.H. King and W.M. Stevens (Collegeville, MN, 1979), pp. 301-29.
- , *Klerus und Krieg Im Früheren Mittelalter: Untersuchungen Zur Rolle Der Kirche Beim Aufbau Der Köigsherrschaft Vol 2, Monographien Zur Geschichte Des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart, 1971).
- Reuter, T., 'Assembly Politics in Western Europe from the Eighth to the Twelfth Century', in *The Medieval World*, ed. P. Lineham and J.L. Nelson (London, 2001).
- , *Germany in the Early Middle Ages c. 800-1056* (London, 1991).
- , ed., *The Medieval Nobility: Studies on the Ruling Classes of France and Germany from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century* (Amsterdam, 1979).
- Roach, L., *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871-978: Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2013).
- , 'Law Codes and Legal Norms in Later Anglo-Saxon England', *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), 465-86.
- Rollason, D.W., *Northumbria, 500-1100: Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2003).
- , *Two Anglo-Saxon Rituals: The Dedication of a Church and Judicial Ordeal* (Leicester, 1988).
- Rumble, A., 'The Burghal Hidage as a Document', in *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications*, ed. D. Hill and A. Rumble (Manchester, 1996), pp. 69-91.
- , 'Edward the Elder and the Churches of Winchester and Wessex', in *Edward the Elder, 899-924*, ed. N.J. Higham and D. Hill (London, 2001), pp. 230-47.
- Schmid, K., 'Religiöses Und Sippengebundenes Gemeinschaftsbewußtsein in Frühmittelalterlichen Gedenkhucheinträgen', in *Gebetsgedenken Und Adliges Selbstverständnis Im Mittelalter: Ausgewählte Beiträge*, ed. K. Schmid (Sigmaringen, 1983).
- , 'The Structure of the Nobility in the Earlier Middle Ages', in *The Medieval Nobility: Studies on the Ruling Classes of France and Germany from the Sixth to the Twelfth Centuries*, ed. T. Reuter (New York, 1978), pp. 37-60.
- Schneidmüller, B., 'Rule by Consensus: Forms and Concepts of Political Order in the European Middle Ages', *Medieval History Journal*, 16 (2013), 449-71.
- Scragg, D.G., ed., *Edgar, King of the English, 959-975: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge, 2008).
- Senecal, C., 'Bishops as Contenders for Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England: The Bishopric of East Anglia and the Regional Aristocracy', in *Negotiating Secular and Ecclesiastical Power: Western Europe in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. A.J.A. Bijsterveld, H. Teunis and A. Wareham (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 89-106.
- , 'Keeping up with the Godwinesons: In Pursuit of Aristocratic Status in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Norman Studies, XXIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2000.*, ed. J. Gillingham (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 251-66.
- Sharpe, R., 'The Use of Writs in the Eleventh Century', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2003), 247-91.

- Smith, M.F., 'Archbishop Stigand and the Eye of the Needle', in *Anglo-Norman Studies, XVI: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1993*, ed. M. Chibnall (Woodbridge, 1994), pp. 199-219.
- , 'The Preferment of Royal Clerks in the Reign of Edward the Confessor', *Haskins Society Journal*, 9 (2001), 159-73.
- Smith, S.T., 'Of Kings and Cattle Thieves: The Rhetorical Work of the Fonthill Letter', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 106 (2007), 447-67.
- Stafford, P., 'Political Ideas in Late Tenth-Century England: Charters as Evidence', in *Law, Laity and Solidarities: Essays in Honour of Susan Reynolds*, ed. P. Stafford, J.L. Nelson and J. Martindale (Manchester, 2001).
- , *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford, 1997).
- , *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1998).
- , 'The Reign of Æthelred II, a Study in the Limitations on Royal Policy and Action', *British Archaeological Reports, British Series*, 59 (1978), 15-46.
- , 'Kinship and Women in the World of Maldon: Byrhtnoth and His Family', in *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, ed. J. Cooper (London, 1993), pp. 225-35.
- Stenton, F.M., *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971 and reprints).
- Stevenson, W.H., 'Trinoda Necessitas', *English Historical Review*, 29 (1914), 689-702.
- Stubbs, W., *The Constitutional History of England in Its Origin and Development* 6th edn (Oxford, 1897).
- , ed., *Memorials of Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1874).
- Tinti, F., *Sustaining Belief: The Church of Worcester from c.870 to c.1100*, *Studies in Early Medieval Britain* (Farnham, 2010).
- Tollerton, L., *Wills and Will-Making in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2011).
- Wareham, A., *Lords and Communities in Early Medieval East Anglia* (Woodbridge, 2005).
- , 'Saint Oswald's Family and Kin', in *St Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. N. Brooks and C. Cubitt (London, 1996), pp. 46-63.
- , 'The Transformation of Kinship and the Family in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Early Medieval Europe*, 10 (2001), 375-99.
- , 'Two Models of Marriage: Kinship and the Social Order in England and Normandy', in *Negotiating Secular and Ecclesiastical Power: Western Europe in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. A.J.A. Bijsterveld, H. Teunis and A. Wareham (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 107-32.
- Williams, A., *Æthelred the Unready: The Ill-Counselled King* (London, 2003).
- , 'The Cunning of the Dove: Wulfstan and the Politics of Accommodation', in *St Wulfstan and His World*, ed. J. Barrow and N. Brooks (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 23-38.
- , 'An Introduction to the Worcestershire Domesday', in *The Worcestershire Domesday*, ed. A. Williams and R.W.H. Erskine (London, 1988), pp. 1-39.
- , 'The King's Nephew: The Family and Career of Ralph, Earl of Hereford', in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, C.J. Holdsworth and J.L. Nelson (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 327-43.
- , *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England c. 500-C1066* (London, 1999).
- , 'Land and Power in the Eleventh-Century: The Estates of Harold Godwinson', *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies*, 3 (1980), 171-87.
- , 'Lost Worlds: Kentish Society in the Eleventh Century', *Medieval Prosopography: History and Collective Biography*, 20 (1999), 51-74.

- , 'Princeps Merciorum Gentis: The Family, Career and Connections of Ælfhere, Ealdorman of Mercia, 956-83', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 10 (1982), 143-72.
- , 'A Vice-Comital Family in Pre-Conquest Warwickshire', in *Anglo-Norman Studies, XII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1988*, ed. R.A. Brown (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 279-95.
- , 'A West-Country Magnate of the Eleventh Century: The Family, Estates and Patronage of Beorhtric Son of Ælfgar', in *Family Trees and the Roots of Politics: The Prosopography of Britain and France from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century*, ed. K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 41-68.
- , *The World before Domesday: The English Aristocracy 900-1066* (London, 2008).
- Wormald, P., 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 17 (1988), 247-81.
- , *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, Volume I Legislation and Its Limits* (London, 2001).
- , 'The Strange Affair of the Selsey Bishopric, 953-963', in *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. R. Gameson and H. Leyser (Oxford, 2001), pp. 128-41.
- Yorke, B., 'Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century', in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. B. Yorke (Woodbridge, 1988), pp. 89-118.
- Zielinski, H., *Der Reichsepiskopat in Spätottonischer Und Salischer Zeit, (1002-1125)* (Stuttgart, 1984).

UNPUBLISHED THESES

- Banton, N., 'Ealdormen and Earls in England from the Reign of King Alfred to the Reign of King Aethelred II' (Thesis (D Phil), University of Oxford, 1981).
- Lloyd, J., 'Reeves as Agents of Royal Government in the English Shires, from the Reign of Alfred to Domesday Book' (Ph.D., University of Cambridge, 2014).
- Mitton, N.L., 'Grasing Schemer or Hostage to Fortune: The Life and Career of Stigand, Last Anglo-Saxon Bishop of Canterbury' (Unpublished Dissertation, St. Andrews, 2009).

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Matthew, H. C. G. and B. Harrison, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), consulted at <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>>
- Nelson, J.L, S. Keynes, S. Baxter et al., *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* consulted at <<http://www.pase.ac.uk/index.html>>
- Sawyer, P. H., *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968), revised S.E. Kelly, *The Electronic Sawyer*, consulted at <<http://esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html>>