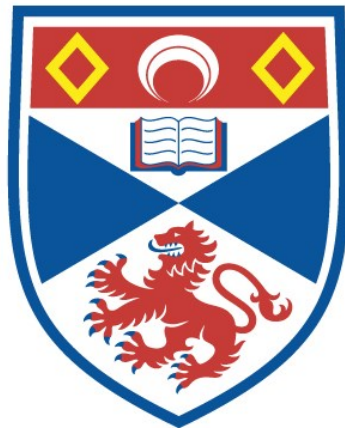


THE FENLAND MONASTERIES DURING THE REIGN OF KING STEPHEN

Ethan George Birney

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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The Fenland Monasteries During the Reign of King Stephen

Ethan George Birney



University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

at the University of St Andrews

December 2018

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I, Ethan George Birney, do hereby certify that this thesis, submitted for the degree of PhD, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

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Abstract

This thesis considers the experience of the Fenland houses during the reign of Stephen, 1135-1154. It particularly focuses on wrongs committed against the houses during those years and the degree to which prelates helped or hindered their houses' well-being. The primary source materials are narrative histories produced at the houses and documents concerning house lands and rights that were principally preserved in monastic cartularies. The thesis is divided into four chapters that progress largely chronologically. The two central chapters focus on Stephen's reign. The first and last chapters present the preceding and succeeding years to ensure that Stephen's reign is set in context. While episodes from the Fens regularly illustrate studies of the twelfth century, no in-depth study has examined the Fenland houses during the years of Stephen's reign. This thesis will focus on the documentary evidence concerning the houses and the more subjective house histories in order to provide a fuller picture of how what the houses endured and how they remembered Stephen's reign. Although the specific turmoil they experienced cannot exemplify Stephen's reign in England or even the general monastic experience of those years, it does provide a focused study of what monastic houses in a particular area underwent. Many of the problems are in no way unique to the Fens. Concerns over possession of lands, differences between prelates and monks, and violence intruding from the outside world were common to religious houses throughout England during the mid twelfth century. This study will use the extant records of the mid-to-late twelfth century to question the reality of suffering under Stephen and the role of prelates in affecting their houses' experiences. This examination will ultimately shed some light on the situation in England more generally during that troubled time.

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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my daughter, Maria. Even the darkest day is made bright by her smile.

Abbreviations

<i>ASC-E</i> , ed. Irvine	<i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition Volume 7 MS. E A semi-diplomatic edition with introduction and indices</i> , ed. Susan Irvine (Cambridge, 2004).
<i>CAR</i>	<i>Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis, a saec. X. usque ad an. Circiter 1200: in Quatuor Partibus</i> , ed., W. Dunn Macray (London 1886).
<i>Charters of Henry II</i> , ed. Holt and Vincent	<i>The Letters and Charters of Henry II</i> , eds. J. C. Holt and Nicholas Vincent (unpublished, 2011).
<i>CMR</i>	<i>Cartularium Monasterii de Rameseia</i> , eds. William Henry Hart and Ponsonby A. Lyons, 3 vols. (London, 1884-1893).
<i>EEA</i>	English Episcopal Acta (London or Oxford, 1980-2016).
<i>HC</i> , ed. Mellows	Hugh Candidus, <i>The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus a Monk of Peterborough</i> , ed. W. T. Mellows (London, 1949).
<i>LE</i> , ed. Blake	<i>Liber Eliensis</i> , ed. E. O. Blake (London, 1962).
<i>ODNB</i>	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [http://www.oxforddnb.com]
<i>Pytchley</i>	CUL, Peterborough Dean and Chapter MS. 5, <i>The Book of Charters and Privileges of Henry of Pytchley Junior</i> .
<i>RB Thorney</i>	CUL, Add. 3020-3021, <i>The Red Book of Thorney</i> .
<i>RB Exchequer</i>	<i>The Red Book of the Exchequer</i> , 3 vols., ed. Hubert Hall (London, 1896).

- RRAN* ii *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum 1066-1154 vol. ii, Regesta Henrici Primi 1100-1135*, eds. Charles Johnson and H. A. Cronne (Oxford, 1956).
- RRAN* iii *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum 1066-1154 vol. iii, Regesta Regis Stephani ac Mathildis Imperatricis ac Gaufridi et Henrici Ducum Normannorum 1135-1154*, eds. H. C. Cronne, and R. H. C. Davis (Oxford, 1968).
- Swaffham* CUL, Peterborough Dean and Chapter MS. 1, *The Book of Robert of Swaffham*.
- Thorney LV* *The Thorney Liber Vitae London, British Library, Additional MS 40,000, fols 1-12r Edition, Facsimile and Study*, eds. Lynda Rollason et al. (Woodbridge, 2015).
- VCH* Page, William, et al. eds., *Victoria History of the Counties of England* (London, 1900-present).

Introduction

According to his twelfth-century apologist, Abbot Walter of Ramsey faced a series of trials during the reign of King Stephen.¹ In 1143, overwhelmed by the worldly business of his office, he resigned his abbacy at the urging of a monk of the house named Daniel. However, Walter quickly regretted his decision, and rushed back to Rome where he convinced the pope that he and not Daniel should be abbot. Although Walter met with success in Rome, his problems were just beginning. Upon returning to England, he found Ramsey Abbey occupied by the forces of Geoffrey de Mandeville, the Earl of Essex. The earl, rebelling against King Stephen, had driven Ramsey's monks from their beds and assigned the abbey's possessions to his own needs. Nothing Walter did convinced Geoffrey to restore the abbey to monastic control. Eventually, in August 1144, Geoffrey died after being wounded fighting royal forces. Yet even this change in affairs did not end Walter's woes. Upon regaining control of Ramsey, Walter had to both re-establish the abbey's financial stability and regain King Stephen's favor. He spent the rest of his career doing so, so much so that when he died early in the reign of Henry II, Stephen's successor, the abbot left Ramsey flourishing.

This episode of Abbot Walter lies at the heart of Stephen's reign, a time long known as "The Anarchy."² The lack of central control that elicited such a connotative name affected all of England to various degrees and was particularly felt in the Fenlands. Although the region had experienced unrest before, it was better known as the peaceful, albeit marshy, home of five major Benedictine houses and their respective monks. Ely, Peterborough, Ramsey, Thorney, and Crowland were all affected by the troubles of Stephen's reign. It is not surprising then that one of these houses, Peterborough, provided an often-quoted description of the horrors of the reign in its continuation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. On the other hand, Peterborough also provides evidence of monastic building and growth during Stephen's reign, one of the facts which has led historians such as Graeme White to question just how bad the reign of Stephen was.³ With these houses and their particular troubles in mind, this thesis will focus on the experience of the Fenland houses during Stephen's reign.

¹ *Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis, a saec. X. usque ad an. Circiter 1200: in Quatuor Partibus*, ed., W. Dunn Macray (London 1886), 325-336. Walter's history is related in a brief narrative at the end of Ramsey's charter-chronicle discussed below, pages 7-8.

² Edward J. Kealey, "King Stephen: Government and Anarchy," *Albion* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Autumn, 1974), 201-217, 201-202.

³ Graeme J. White, "The Myth of the Anarchy," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 22, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 2000), 323-337.

The Fenland Houses

The Fenland houses shared similar geographic benefits and drawbacks. In the twelfth-century the Peterborough monk, Hugh Candidus, recognized them as similarly placed houses, which were located in hard-to-reach locations divinely established for the pursuit of monasticism.⁴ Although a boon to spirituality, this isolation inhibited commerce and made the Fens an ideal ground for rebels. After the Conquest, Hereward, a Peterborough tenant, used Ely as a base of anti-Norman fighters. During Stephen's reign both Bishop Nigel of Ely and Geoffrey de Mandeville, Earl of Essex, rebelled against the king from the Fens. Both Barons's Wars of the thirteenth century also saw the Isle used to withstand royal authority. Of course, Geoffrey's fortification of Ramsey is widely known. Clearly, the isolation that the monks enjoyed was not only a gift to spiritual contemplation, but also a lure to rebels. The watery landscape which surrounded the Fenland houses was indeed a mixed blessing for monks, abbots, and bishops who lived there. Whilst it limited travel and left little dry ground for expansion of cultivation, the fenland also offered a multitude of wildlife, most notably eels, which could be harvested. Over time the houses benefitted from the draining of sections of the Fens.⁵ However, the great draining of the Fens was a much later effort. For the mediaeval monks of the Fens, their natural world provided a barrier inhibiting, but not preventing, interaction with the rest of the world. Although physically isolated, their records do not suggest the monks felt themselves to be religiously or intellectually cut off.

In addition to sharing the same locale, the houses were culturally similar with foundations by saintly bishops in the tenth-century reforms. Three houses claimed pre-Danish foundations. Ely associated itself closely with its patron saint and founder, Æthelthryth, an East Anglian princess and sometime Queen of Northumbria.⁶ Peterborough was founded in the late seventh century as Medehampstede in Mercia; while Thorney was a cell of Peterborough's known as Ancarig.⁷ All three houses suffered under the Danish invasions and were reestablished by Bishop Aethelwold during Edgar's reign, 959-975.⁸ Ramsey was a new foundation that was also established during Edgar's reign. Unlike the other three houses it

⁴ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 5.

⁵ H. C. Darby, *The Changing Fenland* (Cambridge, 1983), 15-18

⁶ Edward Miller, *The Abbey & Bishopric of Ely: The Social History of an Ecclesiastical Estate from the tenth century to the early fourteenth century* (Cambridge, 1951, reprint 1969), 8-10.

⁷ Edmund King, *Peterborough Abbey 1086-1310: A Study in the Land Market* (Cambridge, 1973), 6; VCH *Cambridgeshire*, ii, 210.

⁸ David 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 ed. (Cambridge, 1966), 32, 50-51.

was a joint foundation established by Bishop Oswald and Æthelwine, the ealdorman of East Anglia and foster brother of the king.⁹ The fifth of the Fenland houses, Crowland has far less documentary evidence for its supposed pre-Danish foundation or its state after the reform movement.¹⁰ The other four houses taken together show a remarkable similarity in background. Although Ramsey lacked the pre-Danish history of Aethelwold's refoundations, in the tenth century all four houses were set up as part of the wave of new Benedictine houses. They were all endowed with land, although the division between Aethelwold's three houses was scarcely even. And although the houses weathered the reigns of William I and his sons unevenly, all were at least moderately prosperous by the second quarter of the twelfth century. This shared background helps make the four major Fenland houses a valid subject of study.

The Fenland houses also share, by and large, an impressive collection of extant records representative of their size and intellectual and political importance. Ramsey was known as a center of learning before the Conquest.¹¹ Ely and Peterborough were better known for their political connections. For example, when Harold Harefoot needed a place to send the maimed aetheling Alfred to die, it was Ely that received him.¹² Abbot Leofric, who was abbot of Peterborough and held Thorney and Crowland as well, was present at Hastings and died shortly thereafter.¹³ Records of the houses continue after the Conquest. Ramsey continued to produce written work, although it never became a focal point of monastic learning in the Anglo-Norman world. Peterborough and Ely also produced local histories. All five houses appeared in the preeminent national record, Domesday Book, as well. Ely was by far the richest of the group and the second-richest monastery in England; Peterborough and Ramsey were very well off; but Thorney and Crowland were among the least-endowed houses in England.¹⁴ The lands these houses held, as well as their sense of pride in their identity and history, led all the houses to produce records. However, whilst four have reputable extant histories and documentary evidence for the twelfth century, Crowland's sources are not dependable. Its early narrative history claims to be the work of the post-

⁹ J. Ambrose Raftis, *The Estates of Ramsey Abbey: A Study in Economic Growth and Organization* (Toronto, 1957), 6-7; Cyril Hart, "Aethelwine [Ethelwine, Aethelwine Dei Amicus] (d. 992)," *ODNB* (2005) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/8919>, accessed 19 November, 2018], 1.

¹⁰ Frances M. Page, *The Estates of Crowland Abbey: A Study in Manorial Organisation* (Cambridge, 1934), 4-5.

¹¹ Knowles, *Monastic Order*, 2nd ed., 46-47.

¹² Lawson, M. K., "Alfred Aetheling (d. 1036/37)," *ODNB* (2004) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/184>, accessed 19 November 2018], 1-2.

¹³ Knowles, *Monastic Order*, 2nd ed., 72, 103-104.

¹⁴ Knowles gives the following valuations: Ely, £768.18s.8d; Ramsey, £358.5s; Peterborough, £323.8d; Thorney, £53.15s; and Croyland, £52.6s. *Monastic Order*, 2nd ed., 702-703.

Conquest Abbot Ingulf, but research has proved that authorship to be spurious.¹⁵ Furthermore, later continuations lack contents for 1118-1144, and what remains of the rest of Stephen's reign is fragmentary condition.¹⁶ In addition, the Wrest Park Cartulary has little value for a study of Crowland in the twelfth century.¹⁷ This combination of almost nonexistent narrative material and limited documentary evidence means that Crowland cannot be part of this study of the Fenland houses during Stephen's reign. Despite the unavoidable exclusion of Crowland, the remaining four houses provide enough material to consider their experience during Stephen's reign and to examine how prelatial activity affected those years. This thesis will use the monastic histories and documentary evidence from the Fens, as well as pertinent contemporary histories, to consider the four Fenland houses, Ely, Peterborough, Ramsey and Thorney during the mid-twelfth century.

Primary Sources

As Antonia Gransden noted, "the reign of King Stephen was rich in historical and quasi-historical productions."¹⁸ Some, such as the *Gesta Stephani*, Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*, and William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella*, offer national views of the time.¹⁹ In other cases, the histories that were written largely concern themselves with local affairs.²⁰ Three of the Fenland houses produced such works shortly after Stephen's reign. This section will consider their background and significance as well as another source of local history, the continuation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which was produced at Peterborough during the same period following the accession of Henry II.

Dating and place of composition make the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* version E a significant source. It is older than the three purely local histories to be considered, dating to "around 1154/55."²¹ This final extant addition to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* continues the work's focus on Peterborough while giving an account of the nation as a whole. Unlike the rest of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, version E ceased being an annual or semi-annual

¹⁵ Page, *Crowland*, 4. David Roffe argues for a more trusting reading of Pseudo-Ingulf, but his defense acknowledges that "the *Historia* is a late compilation" that used forged charters to defend the house's presumably legal rights. "The *Historia Croylandensis*: A Plea for Reassessment," *English Historical Review*, Vol. 111, No. 435 (Feb., 1995), 93-108, 94, 107-108.

¹⁶ Henry T. Riley, "Preface" in Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland with the Continuations by Peter of Blois and Anonymous Writers (London, 1908), vi.

¹⁷ Sandra Raban, *The Estates of Thorney and Crowland: A study in medieval monastic land tenure* (Cambridge, 1977), 4.

¹⁸ Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London, 1974), 186.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 186ff

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 269ff.

²¹ Malasree Home, *The Peterborough Version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Rewriting Post-Conquest History* (Woodbridge, 2015), 82.

production, but was written in one block which covered all nineteen years of Stephen's reign through Henry II's acceptance of William de Waterville as abbot of Peterborough in early 1155.²² The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle E* provides a near contemporary account of the problems associated with Stephen's reign. Its view of the time is almost unremittingly bad, but the author does allow that Peterborough Abbey itself was able to prosper.²³ This surprisingly cheerful interruption into a catalogue of woes is attributed to Abbot Martin's "great effort" in his office.²⁴ Although the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle E* offers more or less the same information concerning Martin's abbacy that Hugh Candidus does, the vivid pictures it paints of the time offer more information of how a monk in the Fens might describe Stephen's reign.

The other three narrative histories fall into the category of charter-chronicles. These sources offer a mixture of narrative, charters, and miracles. These sources have received some scholarly attention as a genre. G. R. C. Davis summarized their description in a short paragraph and noted that charter-chronicles tend to become simply cartularies.²⁵ Antonia Gransden offered only a little more and viewed "the history of Ely and much of the ... Ramsey [chronicle as] little more than inflated cartularies."²⁶ The genre received more attention and appreciation from Jennifer Paxton in her thesis.²⁷ Paxton persuasively argues that the combination of chronicle, charter, and miracle story was designed to unify its house and warn off aggressors.²⁸ This argument actually accords with part of Gransden's claim that the local historians of the twelfth and early-thirteenth century "hoped ... [to] establish his community's reputation more firmly and define its privileges and properties more clearly."²⁹ Paxton's research shows that the mixed nature of the charter-chronicles was designed to be more effective in furthering these aims than a simple history, cartulary, or list of miracles could be on its own. While the balance of charter, chronicle, and miracle varies between the three sources used in this thesis, all bring evidence to the study.

²² *The Peterborough Chronicle 1070-1154*, ed. Cecily Clark, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1970), xxv, 60.

²³ *ASC-E*, ed. Irvine, 134-136.

²⁴ "On al þis yuele time heold Martin abbot his abbotrice ... mid micel suinc." *ASC-E*, ed. Irvine, 135.

²⁵ G. R. C. Davis, *Medieval Cartularies of Great Britain and Ireland*, revised by Claire Breay, Julian Harrison and David M. Smith, (London, 2010), xvi.

²⁶ Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 272.

²⁷ Jennifer Paxton, "Charter and Chronicle in Twelfth-Century England: The House-Histories of the Fenland Abbeys" (unpublished PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1999).

²⁸ Paxton, "Charter and Chronicle," 8.

²⁹ Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 269.

The Peterborough Chronicle of Hugh Candidus offers a contemporary and local account of Stephen's reign from a monk of the house.³⁰ Hugh Candidus apparently spent most of his life at Peterborough Abbey and died, an aged monk, sometime after the accession of William de Waterville as abbot in 1155.³¹ Although the work is commonly attributed to Hugh, third-person comments show it to have been edited by a contemporary of his, and the final remarks on the deposing of William de Waterville must postdate Hugh's death.³² Unfortunately, the earliest manuscript cannot be analyzed because it burned in the Ashburnham House fire of 1731.³³ The edited text of W. T. Mellows is based upon a mid-seventeenth century transcript of the original and two versions of the chronicle as it was copied and continued.³⁴ Hugh's history has great value as a source for how Abbot Martin was viewed by at least some of the convent during his abbacy of 1133-1155. Although Hugh did not invariably praise his house's abbots, he presented Martin as a paragon of virtue and diligence and finds fault for only one decision that the abbot made.³⁵ Hugh's account of the years that Stephen reigned does not provide much consideration of the Fenland experience beyond Peterborough and instead focus on the internal affairs of the abbey. Local prelates are mentioned when they interact with the abbey, but the momentous events at Ely and Ramsey receive no mention.³⁶ While Hugh acknowledged the troubles of the time, his focus was firmly on Peterborough because, as he wrote, "we did not set out to write all the evils that were born by the monks because many people have written many things [on that topic]."³⁷

Ely's local history, the *Liber Eliensis*, provides only slightly more detail of outside affairs. This account of Ely's history from its founding by Æthelthryth, through the death of Nigel of Ely, bishop from 1133-1169, focuses on "wonder-provoking deeds" of the house, how it obtained its lands, and the rights of its monks against overweening bishops.³⁸ E. O. Blake, who edited the standard text, argues for a single compiler of the *Liber Eliensis* who brought together several preexisting parts of the work through Book III, ch. 43; the rest,

³⁰ Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 271.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 271.

³² *HC*, ed. Mellows, xvii.

³³ *Ibid.*, xvii-xviii.

³⁴ The first continuation was by Robert of Swaffham in the mid-thirteenth century and the second by Walter of Whittlesey in the early fourteenth century. CUL Dd. 14. 28; CUL, Peterborough D&C MS. 1; BL Add 39758.

³⁵ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 122.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 105, 124.

³⁷ "Set non proposuimus omnia mala que gerebantur monachis scribere, quia multi multa scripserunt." *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁸ *LE*, ed. Blake, Prologue, p. 1; bk. 3, Prologue, p. 237. Henceforth citation to the *Liber Eliensis* will specify book, chapter, and the page number of Blake's edition.

relating Ely's history under Nigel's episcopate, was the work of the compiler.³⁹ Although the *Liber Eliensis* seems to be largely free of "forgery, bias, ... ignorance or misinterpretation" in its use of documents, it offers little of value concerning "general English history" and even offers a "confused ... sequence of events" when discussing the career of Nigel when he was in opposition to Stephen.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the *Liber Eliensis* remains a vital source of local information during Stephen's reign. The compiler's lack of precision is explicable when his purpose of presenting the monks's position and their saintly backing is emphasized. The precise chronology of a bishop who ignored his monks advice and "improperly distributed the properties of the saintly one" was not the chief concern of the history.⁴¹ This lack of focus on some details does not undermine the usefulness of the *Liber Eliensis* as a source for the period. The *Liber Eliensis* brings together reputable charters and although its local account is biased against Nigel, that bias does not undermine the usefulness of or general accuracy of the work.

Ramsey Abbey records include a history published by the Rolls Series as the *Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis*, also referred to as the *Liber Benefactorum*, which presents the abbey's history from its foundation in both narrative and charter. Associated with both extant copies of the *Chronicon* is a history of the abbey under Abbot Walter, 1133-1161.⁴² This *Narratio de Abbate Gualtero*, like the history of Martin by Hugh Candidus, is deeply sympathetic to the house's abbot and commends to Walter's critics a warning from Ovid: "It is as much the duty of the judge to inquire into the timings of events as into the events themselves; by inquiring into the time you will be safe."⁴³ The author seems to consider Ramsey's troubles to be the fault of an internal usurper and an invader rather than the result of any poor choices on the abbot's part. But unlike in Peterborough, in Ramsey's case there is more work for the apologist: Walter apparently did follow bad advice in the early 1140s which directly led to some of the abbey's problems. The author of the *Narratio* sets out to explain away Walter's poor choice and to overwhelm that account with descriptions of his virtuous deeds, an attempt which seems to have been written shortly after the abbot's death. Although the *Narratio* does not provide a general history of Walter's abbacy, much less a discussion of Stephen's reign, it remains a useful source in considering both. Although Walter is defended, some of his poor decisions are explicitly stated and others alluded to.

³⁹ *LE*, ed. Blake, Prologue, p. xlvi.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. l, lviii, and 433.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 62, pp. 314-315; "indebite possessiones sancte disperserat," ch. 138, p. 385.

⁴² Paxton, "Charter and Chronicle," 113.

⁴³ "Si iudex esse volueris, illud Ovidianum non contempnas — 'Judicis officium est, ut res, ita tempora rerum, quaerere; quaesito tempore tutus eris.'" *CAR*, 334.

However, with the author's goal in mind, his comments on Stephen should be read critically as Walter's standard-bearer needed as many culprits as possible for the abbey's problems. Nevertheless, the basic facts of Stephen's interactions with Ramsey during his reign, if not his motivations, are laid out for the reader. Clearly the author of the *Narratio* felt deeply loyal to Walter and was determined to present a defense of his abbacy.

Of course, using sources which are designed to draw the reader's attention to the house's rights and possessions presents a challenge to the historian. Hugh Candidus would have the reader see almost no fault in Martin of Bec and William of Waterville. Likewise, the *Narratio* cannot countenance criticism of Walter. On the other hand the *Liber Eliensis* presents almost nothing positive about Nigel. If these sources were read alone, the history of the Fenland houses during Stephen's reign would indeed be rather one sided, and so the charter-chronicles must be balanced with other sources. The addition of documentary sources helps not only to broaden the thesis's understanding of the period, but also to avoid the danger of being captivated by the voice of whichever monk wrote a history for his house. To this end, this thesis also considers non-narrative sources.

All four houses are served with collections of sources with less clearly partisan viewpoints, in particular charters and writs. Peterborough has two principle cartularies which cover the twelfth century. The first Peterborough cartulary, the Book of Privileges of Henry of Pytchley junior, is an early thirteen-century cartulary and contains a number of records from the time of Abbot Martin and earlier.⁴⁴ These are not traditional charters, but rather records of agreements made at the abbatial court and the witnesses who testified of them. The Book of Robert of Swaffham dates to the mid-thirteenth century and contains copies of the charters found in Henry of Pytchley junior's book, in a larger and clearer hand.⁴⁵ Thorney Abbey also has two valuable sources of evidence for the twelfth century. The Red Book of Thorney dates to the late fourteenth century, but includes abbatial charters from the abbots during Stephen's reign.⁴⁶ This cartulary, written in a clear hand throughout, contains various other charters relating to the abbey from kings, bishops, and donors. Thorney also produced a *Liber Vitae* in the first twelve folios of an "early tenth century ... western Frankish" Gospel Book around the turn of the twelfth century.⁴⁷ The extensive edition and study of the *Liber Vitae* shows further connections between individuals mentioned in the Thorney charters and

⁴⁴ *Pytchley*; Davis, *Medieval Cartularies*, rev. ed., 152-153. Janet D. Martin, *The Cartularies and Registers of Peterborough Abbey* (Peterborough, 1978), 7-12 and 15-16.

⁴⁵ *Swaffham*; Davis, *Medieval Cartularies*, rev. ed., 153.

⁴⁶ *RB Thorney*. Davis, *Medieval Cartularies*, rev. ed., 195. A digitized copy of The Red Book is available through the Cambridge University Library website.

⁴⁷ *Thorney LV*, 20, 31, 36.

the house. The study of Nigel and Ely during Stephen's reign is simplified through the work of Nicholas Karn's *English Episcopal Acta* 31, a thoroughly annotated edition of the bishops's charters.⁴⁸ Finally, Ramsey is served by the Rolls Series edition of both its cartulary and the charters contained in its charter-chronicle. The cartulary is published in three volumes and provides a wealth of evidence for the twelfth century and beyond. In addition to this selection of Fenland house records, the rulers of England, and one would-be ruler, issued numerous charters that remain extant in their originals or in copy. The *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum* volumes II and III cover charters issued by Henry I, Stephen, Matilda, and Henry II before Henry II's accession.⁴⁹ Henry II's regnal charters, many of which exist in the abbeys' own cartularies, have been collected by Sir James Holt and Nicholas Vincent in an as-yet-unpublished edition.⁵⁰

Of course, even writs and charters must be read with care as their seemingly impartial legal format may veil partisan authorship. Since beneficiaries requested royal charters, it would be expected that these royal charters would support the abbeys. In addition, the majority of extant cartularies are of religious houses. Charters to lay individuals in which the abbatial or conventual position is undermined may have disappeared over the centuries. Extant charters are, however, what remain to be studied. Useful arguments can rarely be made from silence and this thesis will use the available charter evidence while considering its provenance. This array of charters and writs concerning the Fenland houses offers the historian a valuable supply of data to disagree with or corroborate the local narrative sources and contemporary accounts of the period. Together, the local narrative sources, writs and charters, and national histories form the primary sources of this study.

Another potential primary source for Stephen's reign, archaeology, has received recent and somewhat unfruitful attention. Oliver H. Creighton and Duncan W. Wright's *The Anarchy*, focuses on the archaeological evidence of Stephen's reign and considers the use of ecclesiastical buildings as part of the study.⁵¹ In their attempt to expand consideration of the period beyond "the same body of documentary source material" Creighton and Wright were unable to show that "the events of 'the Anarchy' actually created a clear and detectable

⁴⁸ *EEA 31 Ely 1109-1197*, ed. Nicholas Karn (Oxford, 2005). Although several Ely cartularies are also extant, the focus of this thesis on prelatial agency is sufficiently served by the edited episcopal acta.

⁴⁹ *RRAN* ii-iii. Nicholas Vincent published twenty-five additional charters of Stephen in "New Charters of King Stephen with Some Reflections upon the Royal Forests during the Anarchy" *English Historical Review*, vol. 114 (Sep., 1999), 899-928.

⁵⁰ *Charters of Henry II*, ed. Holt and Vincent.

⁵¹ Oliver H. Creighton and Duncan W. Wright with contributions by Michael Fradley and Steven Trick, *The Anarchy: War and Status in 12th-Century Landscapes of Conflict* (Liverpool, 2016)

archaeological signature.”⁵² They found written sources must be read as literature in which rhetorical devices do not provide a direct parallel with archaeological remains.⁵³ While noting, “the civil war saw no hiatus in the rhythms of everyday life for the vast majority of people” they argue that castles did increase noticeably and that coin hoards might well suggest a spike in instability during Stephen’s reign.⁵⁴ All in all Creighton and Wright emphasize the damages to churches; for example, they note “clear signs of the militarization of ecclesiastical sites,” and the suffering of monastic houses in Cambridgeshire, Yorkshire, and Oxfordshire, and Huntingdonshire.⁵⁵ But in particular they take cognizance of the “unusually severe ... impact of the conflict on the fens ... [which] suffered especially high levels of devastation to their fragile agricultural base.”⁵⁶ Yet these conclusions of suffering seem largely based on primary and secondary written sources and not on archaeological evidence, which mainly focuses on the remains of castles.⁵⁷ Creighton and Wright’s study seems to be a decent source for considering the castles of Stephen’s reign but does not add substantially to written evidence.

Historiography

While contemporary written sources are foundational to this thesis, secondary histories help to set the Fenland houses in their twelfth-century context. This study lies at the intersection of several historiographical themes. Most concretely, a number of house histories shed light on the conditions of the Fenland houses throughout Stephen’s reign and beyond. The house studies date from the mid to later twentieth century and are largely focused on the economic histories of the house in question. Although each of these works makes significant contributions to scholarship, they are not particularly focused on the monastic experience during Stephen’s reign. Moving beyond the houses, much work has been done on Stephen and his reign, the English church, and the barons of medieval England. All of these topics interact with each other and with the idea of “Anarchy” that looms over the nineteen years of Stephen’s reign. This section on historiography will first consider the influence of the house

⁵² Creighton and Wright, *The Anarchy*, 279, 281.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 281-282.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 284, 115, 149-150.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 204-205

⁵⁶ Creighton and Wright, *The Anarchy*, 275.

⁵⁷ Discussion of Ramsey’s fate uses the *Liber Eliensis*, the *Waltham Chronicle*, the *Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis*, the *Book of the Foundation of Walden Monastery*, Gervase of Canterbury, and Raftis’s history. 260-264.

histories on the thesis and then turn to the overarching themes which dominate the historiography of Stephen's reign.

House Histories

A foundational work on the topics of both Ely and land is Edward Miller's *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*. Miller's work covers far more than just Stephen's reign and Nigel's time as bishop; however, his discussion of these topics is illuminating. From the introduction to the last page, Miller makes a point common to Anglo-Norman historians, there is not enough evidence.⁵⁸ He notes of Nigel "the fragments of records which have survived show what a great man he was."⁵⁹ In the fragments, Miller finds themes common among ecclesiastical houses during the Anglo-Norman era. One is that of heavy feudal burdens. Demands on the see or its bishop included the following: providing knights or paying scutage in their stead, garrisoning Norwich Castle (Henry I changed the location of service to the Isle of Ely), enduring royal custodians during episcopal vacancies, and advising the king.⁶⁰ While the *servitium* was less onerous than that placed on other ecclesiastical estates, it was still a considerable burden. A second and related theme is the constant battle against the erosion of ecclesiastical lands.⁶¹ Establishing knights' fees led to the loss of lands. At the beginning of his episcopate Nigel worked to resume lands lost by Ely's Norman abbots and Bishop Hervey.⁶² However, later events seemed to have worked against his first intentions as the political and military troubles of Stephen's reign created or exacerbated difficulties that Ely had in retaining its lands.⁶³ A final theme is the conflict between the head of a house (a bishop for most of Ely's history) and the monks who lived there. For example, Miller notes that the monks wanted independent control of their lands.⁶⁴ Miller suggests that Nigel avoided another potential conflict when he accepted the prior and convent's demand for equal enjoyment of the liberty with the bishop. This allowed them, among other things, their own court with liberties and customs equal to those enjoyed by the bishop in his lands.⁶⁵ Miller's work not only covers key problems that other histories iterate, but also skillfully weaves centuries of monks and bishops through its thematic chapters. Miller states his work's

⁵⁸ Miller, *Ely*, 80-81.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 77, 154-157; *RRAN* ii, no. 1656.

⁶¹ A common problem for ecclesiastical estates was the loss of lands. Miller contends that Ely suffered more dearly than many other houses in the events of the Conquest. *Ely*, 66-7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 167-174. Miller also argues that Nigel enjoyed a close relationship with his knights. 195.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁵ Miller, *Ely*, 200; *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch 54, pp. 299-301.

limitation in the first chapter. The book is not a history of the abbey and bishopric nor does it consider the bishop as an ecclesiastic.⁶⁶ Miller's focus is on social, economic and institutional history, using Ely as his case study, and he executes this approach with brilliance.

J. Ambrose Raftis' study of Ramsey Abbey is concerned with economic history.⁶⁷ Raftis shows how the abbey experienced rapid growth in Huntingdonshire away from the Fens themselves, gathered gifts after its initial endowment, and experienced trouble holding on to donations "after death removed the protective hand of Aethelwin."⁶⁸ This reminder helps to set in context later troubles that the house had holding on to its lands. Raftis's study offers a view of Ramsey after the Conquest, as it suffered financial losses as Continental knights and royal favorites gained possession of abbey lands through the establishment of knights' fees.⁶⁹ Yet although Raftis's study shows that he was well aware of specifics relating to Ramsey's early twelfth-century troubles with tenure, his first chapters chiefly exist to provide context for the bulk of his study that considers Ramsey's financial situation after Henry II's reign. Raftis's comments on Stephen's reign and Abbot Walter consider Geoffrey de Mandeville's invasion the start of a financial decline in the abbey's well-being, but Raftis seems to allow Walter's poor choices to result completely from the bad situation in which he found himself.⁷⁰ Ultimately, the work's focus is on the ups and downs of Ramsey's estates, and is helpful in setting the abbey's fortunes in context and considering how the abbey dealt with its lands in happier times.

Edmund King, in his study of Peterborough Abbey and its land market, considered the effect of knight service on the house. Peterborough was burdened with a massive *servitium debitum* of sixty knights.⁷¹ King presents land loss as a great threat. Powerful local landowners such as Picot of Cambridge threatened to deprive the abbey of estates.⁷² Knights' fees, with which Peterborough was heavily burdened, needed attention to prevent their complete alienation.⁷³ In some cases the abbey was forced to accept a tenant but managed to keep the land (though not in demesne), but in other cases the land was completely removed from the house's possession.⁷⁴ Peterborough also saw examples of its monks and the abbot failing to work well together. Hugh Candidus noted with extreme disfavor Abbot Thorold's

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1, 4.

⁶⁷ Raftis, *Ramsey*, xi.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1, 13-14.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 24-27.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 86.

⁷¹ King, *Peterborough*, 26.

⁷² Ibid., 19.

⁷³ Ibid., 19-22.

⁷⁴ E.g. Pytchley and Easton. Ibid., 21 and 18-19.

subinfeudation of abbey lands to family members.⁷⁵ King draws attention to how families held and passed on lands of which the abbey was tenant-in-chief during the twelfth century.⁷⁶ In the midst of his study, King's principal comment on Stephen's reign echoes that of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, "the monastery seems not to have lost from the 'nineteen long winters.'"⁷⁷ This unobjectionable conclusion encourages more consideration of why one house so close to such suffering escaped largely unscathed.

Sandra Raban's studies of Thorney and Crowland focus on their property.⁷⁸ As she examines both houses' history, Raban notes a few significant conclusions. Their prosperity was based on the original Anglo-Saxon donations. In addition, over the houses' history fewer and fewer donations were made.⁷⁹ Raban argues that this decline was at least partially because Thorney and Crowland had fewer knights and thus fewer potential local donors than the other Fenland houses.⁸⁰ Much of Raban's study looks at the late twelfth century and beyond, focusing on topics such as land reclamation from the Fens or the abbey's purchases.⁸¹ Although these topics fill out Raban's study in the long history of Thorney and Crowland, they have no significant role in a study of Stephen's reign. Nevertheless she does note that the troubles of Stephen's reign affected Thorney and Crowland and that some donations were made, or at least promised, because of wrongs committed during the reign.⁸² Raban also emphasizes a key difficulty of studying the twelfth century from charters: "it is impossible to date most of them at all closely."⁸³ Raban's work offers a useful study of the two smallest of the Fenland houses.

Each of these histories provides valuable information on the Fenland experience during the reign of Stephen. The theme of disagreement about land use appears in all the histories. Monks seemed to generally regard the immediate furtherance of the monastic life as the legitimate assignment of abbatial revenues. When prelates redirected lands to their families or to knight service, the monks generally objected. These histories also help to place Stephen's reign in the broader context of the tenth to thirteenth centuries. Although the houses enjoyed great significance in national life and politics beginning in the reign of Edgar,

⁷⁵ King, *Peterborough*, 13.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 171

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁸ Raban, *Estates of Thorney and Crowland* and "The Property of Thorney and Crowland Abbeys: A Study in Purchase and Patronage" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1971).

⁷⁹ Raban, *Estates*, 88.

⁸⁰ Raban, *Estates*, 33-34 and 39.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 47-79.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 31.

over time they lost much of their place in English religion and politics. Despite this shift in importance, during the mid-twelfth century the suffering of the Fenland houses drew attention outwith the Fens.

The twelfth-century Church

Beyond the specifics of the Fenland houses detailed in studies by King and others, there are some broad questions of setting for this study. What was the state of the Church in England in the mid-twelfth century? How effective of a king was Stephen? What was the situation of barons who might harm or benefit monastic houses? Over the past hundred years, a number of studies have attempted to answer these questions.

Although the primary focus of this thesis is the experience of a few ecclesiastical institutions during Stephen's reign, much of the Church itself was changing during this time. An overarching question is whether or not the changes that the Church experienced during Stephen's reign were due to his governance of the nation or if they occurred independently. Of course, neither extreme is likely to be true, but historians have tended to shift from favoring the first position to the second. Z. N. L. Brooke's key study, *The English Church and the Papacy* views the English Church as a body that moved from being outwith "the Church as a whole" pre-Conquest to being in "line with the rest of the Church in respect to obedience to Rome and the full working of the canon law of the Roman Church" in the aftermath of Thomas Becket's death.⁸⁴ Brooke viewed Stephen's reign as a point in which the English Church gained its freedom from royal control and became more fully integrated into the Western Church.⁸⁵ King Stephen, his archbishop Theobald, and papal influence all play a role in this shift. Brooke found Stephen incompetent in retaining the power over the English Church that he had inherited from his Anglo-Norman predecessors.⁸⁶ On the other hand Theobald with papal aid in the form of the legateship "was clearly the master of the Church in England."⁸⁷ Thus although accepting that the English Church was changing before Stephen's reign, Brooke viewed the nineteen years of traditionally established "Anarchy" as a key moment in the transformation of relationships between the English monarchy, the English Church, and the Papacy. Although Brooke's view has some validity, not all of his points have gone unopposed. For example, Isabel Megaw argued that Stephen's early

⁸⁴ Z. N. L. Brooke, *The English Church and the Papacy from the Conquest to the Reign of John* (Cambridge, 1931), 23 and 213.

⁸⁵ Brooke, *English Church*, 188

⁸⁶ Brooke, *English Church*, 188.

⁸⁷ Brooke, *English Church*, 183.

ecclesiastical policy, from 1136-1139, was well judged.⁸⁸ While acknowledging that some of Stephen's choices had negative repercussions, she argued that he made reasonable decisions. Megaw found that Stephen's key problem was his self-serving brother Henry, Bishop of Winchester.⁸⁹ Yet while Henry of Winchester may have proved problematic to his brother, this sibling rivalry seems unlikely to have been enough to produce a shift in Anglo-Papal relations. A half century later H. R. Loyn's history of the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Church considered Stephen to be far more effective than Brooke did, but he did agree with Brooke that the English Church was moving during this time towards closer ties to Rome.⁹⁰ These arguments suggest that studies of changes in the English Church under Stephen should primarily consider long-term trends in the Western Church and not simply royal incompetence.

And yet, it cannot be denied that Stephen did not always have a smooth relationship with the Church. A key issue in the historiography is the question of how disruptive Stephen's arrest of the bishops proved to be to the Church and nation: did Stephen doom his reign through one bad choice? This question revolves around one episode. In June 1139, Stephen arrested the curial bishops Roger of Salisbury and his nephew Alexander of Lincoln when they attended his court at Oxford. Roger's other episcopal nephew, Nigel of Ely, fled to Devizes Castle, but was compelled to surrender it. All three bishops lost their castles and Roger died later that year. Early historians such as Brooke argued that Stephen's action damaged both the king's relationship to the Church and also his government since Roger and his family were so involved in the Exchequer.⁹¹ This contention was supported by noting that Stephen's brother who was also papal legate at the time, Henry Bishop of Winchester, called a council to rebuke the king for his actions. Yet whatever remained of this argument about the importance of the arrest was shattered by Kenji Yoshitake.⁹² He argued that although the English Church may not have embraced the arrests, the nation's bishops did not move on from their allegiance to the king or from attending his court. Furthermore, Yoshitake argued that the government kept working even without the support of Roger and his relations.

⁸⁸ Isabel Megaw, "The Ecclesiastical Policy of Stephen: 1136-1139, A Reinterpretation," in *Essays in British and Irish History in Honour of J. E. Todd*, eds. H. A. Cronne, T. W. Moody, and D. B. Quinn (London, 1949), 24-45.

⁸⁹ Megaw, "Ecclesiastical Policy," 43-45.

⁹⁰ H. R. Loyn, *The English Church 940-1154* (Harlow, 2000), 103 and 133. This contention is supported by Martin Brett's chapter on the Papacy and the English Church under Henry I in *The English Church Under Henry I*, 34-63. Brett specifically notes shifting mood of the English clergy towards Rome. *English Church*, 62.

⁹¹ Brooke, *English Church*, 187-189.

⁹² Kenji Yoshitake, "The Arrest of the Bishops in 1139 and Its Consequences," *Journal of Medieval History* Vol. 14 (1988), 97-114.

Yoshitake credits the English Church of holding “the traditional Gelasian view of the coordinate powers: *regnum* and *sacerdotium*.”⁹³ Although his article received some criticism, most significantly from Thomas Callahan, its key arguments remain widely accepted.⁹⁴

Yoshitake’s viewpoint of a national church still following the Gelasian ideal has other backers as well. Jean Truax, in her study of the three Archbishops of Canterbury between Anselm and Thomas Becket contends that the English church was moving from a Gelasian to a Gregorian model during their archiepiscopates.⁹⁵ Thus, changes from the reign of Henry I to that of Stephen may be due more to changes in ecclesiastical mindset than to any specific actions that the king took. Stephen Marritt independently provides support for this argument in his article “King Stephen and the Bishops.”⁹⁶ Marritt considers the bishops to continue in an active role of supporting the king while noting that the decline in royal clerks moving into the episcopate and the high number of councils were both trends seen under Henry I.⁹⁷

Whatever Stephen’s faults, English bishops did not desert him and his reign did not show a sharp change in the king’s relationship with the Church. The current consensus seems to be that King Stephen was not significantly less involved in the Church than his predecessors, but more that the Church was changing to a model in which English churchmen were in ever closer communication with Rome.

Of course, part of the reason that bishops did not attend Stephen’s court was that the Church was occupied in dealing with the tumult which affected his reign. The necessity of addressing domestic disturbance was something of a change, at least according to Martin Brett who found that local warfare was far from ordinary before Stephen’s reign.⁹⁸ He contrasts a general inability of churchmen to stop violence with the Church’s effective arbitration.⁹⁹ He also draws attention to Archbishop Thurstan’s role in defeating the Scottish invasion of 1138.¹⁰⁰ Christopher Holdsworth seems to agree with Brett and offers a mixed

⁹³ Yoshitake, “Arrest,” 108.

⁹⁴ Callahan disputed the degree to which churchmen continued to attend Stephen’s court. He does not contest Yoshitake’s point about the government. “The arrest of the bishops at Stephen’s court: A Reassessment”, *The Haskins Society Journal*, 4 (1992), 97-108.

⁹⁵ Jean Truax, *Archbishops Ralph d’Escures, William of Corbeil and Theobald of Bec: Heirs of Anselm and Ancestors of Becket* (Farnham, 2012), 185.

⁹⁶ Stephen Marritt, “King Stephen and the Bishops,” *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 24 (2002), 129-44.

⁹⁷ Marritt, “Stephen and the Bishops,” 131, 138, and 140.

⁹⁸ Martin Brett, “Warfare and its restraints in England 1066-1154,” in *Militia Christi’ e Crociata nei secoli xi-xiii*, *Miscellanea del Centro di studi medioevali*, 13 (Milan, 1992), 129-144; 133.

⁹⁹ Brett, “Warfare,” 134-135, 137. A point supported by Christopher Holdsworth. “War and Peace in the Twelfth Century: The Reign of Stephen Reconsidered,” in *War and Peace in the Middle Ages*, ed. Brian Patrick McGuire, (Copenhagen, 1987), 67-93, 84-86.

¹⁰⁰ Brett, “Warfare,” 141-144.

opinion of the benefit of bishops to the nation.¹⁰¹ He considered that “the [they] were unable to contribute anything very positive to lessen disorder from 1139 onwards,” but then considers episcopal labors in encouraging “the extraordinary efflorescence of monastic foundations.”¹⁰² Yet Holdsworth somewhat minimalizes the turmoil of the reign when noting “life was not so disturbed that monks and female religious were threatened.”¹⁰³ On the other hand Janet Burton’s study of the role of the Cistercians and Savigniacs in England during the reign of Stephen, notes that “the political situation in England and Normandy” played a role in how English houses interacted with their foreign-based orders.¹⁰⁴ Burton’s essay alludes to the violence and disruption monastic houses faced, but it does not consider the problems in detail. Stephen Marritt returns to the criticism of bishops mentioned by Holdsworth and presents evidence that not all prelates were useless in opposing the violence of the times.¹⁰⁵ Marritt’s defense of the bishops is focused on the important position of the bishop in twelfth-century English society and helps to underline its potential.

Two recent studies offer some consideration of the role of churchmen and Stephen’s reign whilst looking at the concept of militant clergy more generally.¹⁰⁶ Daniel Gerrard’s *The Church at War* offers several close looks at prelates and military activity during Stephen’s reign. Gerrard concludes his study with his findings that there was a place for clerics to take military action, specifically when there was a need for “alternative leaders when the monarch was militarily or politically weak.”¹⁰⁷ When Gerrard discusses not only the temporal military power of clerics, but also their spiritual weapons, he notes several specific examples of the use of excommunication as a means of stopping undesirable behavior from Stephen’s reign in both the north and south of the country.¹⁰⁸ Craig Nakashian’s study generally agrees with Gerrard’s. In his chapter on Stephen’s reign, Nakashian focuses on Henry of Winchester who

¹⁰¹ Christopher Holdsworth, “The Church,” in *The Anarchy of King Stephen’s Reign*, ed. Edmund King (Oxford, 1994), 207-229.

¹⁰² Holdsworth, “The Church,” 215-216.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁰⁴ Janet Burton, “English Monasteries and the Continent,” in *King Stephen’s Reign (1135-1154)*, eds. Paul Dalton and Graeme J. White (Woodbridge, 2008), 98-114, 106.

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Marritt, “Reeds Shaken by the Wind?” in *King Stephen’s Reign (1135-1154)*, eds. Paul Dalton and Graeme J. White (Woodbridge, 2008), 115-138, 116-117.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Gerrard, *The Church at War: The military activities of bishops, abbots and other clergy in England, c.900-1200* (London and New York, 2017); Craig Nakashian, *Warrior Churchmen of Medieval England, 1000-1250: Theory and Reality* (Woodbridge, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Gerrard, *Church at War*, 251. This conclusion, taken with Gerrard’s comments on the Battle of the Standard and Henry of Blois that show Stephen unable to govern as effectively as did his uncles, agrees with Gerrard’s statements that “the term ‘anarchy’ ... is the correct term for the period” and “the term ... can be justified on spiritual grounds alone.” 45-46; 124.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 122-124.

was criticized for his militant appearance.¹⁰⁹ Nakashian notes, however, that Thurstan, Archbishop of York, received praise for his role in the Battle of the Standard in which Northern forces defeated the invading Scottish army.¹¹⁰ These studies present a strong case that, at least during the twelfth century, there was room for churchmen to be involved in military activity without opprobrium.

Although much of the scholarship on Stephen and the Church considered the issue quite broadly, Thomas Callahan's two articles on monastic suffering look specifically at the effect of Stephen's reign on monastic life throughout England. In his first article, published in 1974, Callahan takes a rather sanguine view of reported monastic suffering.¹¹¹ Although specifically limiting himself to "material damages suffered by monastic houses," he seeks to downplay accounts of "destruction and slaughter [as] common occurrences throughout England."¹¹² He argues that claims of injuries were balanced out in three ways by repayment, by new foundations, and by evidence that even the wronged houses were building by the end of Stephen's reign.¹¹³ Before presenting a chart of his assessments, Callahan concludes with an argument that Stephen's reign seemed worse than it was in light of "the comparative peace of Henry I's long reign" and that churchmen indulged in "great exaggerations" of damages experienced.¹¹⁴ In his second article, published four years later, Callahan considers the first of his mitigating factors, repayment.¹¹⁵ But he argues that reparations were not to be relied upon for three reasons: malefactors were not always interested in righting their wrongs, the church was forced to use excommunication somewhat regularly, and "It is impossible to assess accurately relative values of damage and reparations."¹¹⁶ Finally he concludes that perhaps there was not much of an understanding between hard-pressed military men and the church.¹¹⁷ Since Callahan's second article undermines a third of his first argument, only two remain to influence this study. While new foundations were clearly a notable occurrence of Stephen's reign, there can have been little benefit to the preexisting Benedictine houses of the Fens. The final argument demands more consideration especially since Callahan notes records from both Peterborough and Ramsey suggesting that even during Stephen's reign

¹⁰⁹ Nakashian, *Warrior Churchmen*, 184-206.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 191-194.

¹¹¹ Thomas Callahan, Jr., "The Impact of Anarchy on English Monasticism, 1135-1154," *Albion*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Autumn, 1974), 218-232.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 218, 221-222.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 222-224.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹¹⁵ Thomas Callahan, Jr., "Ecclesiastical Reparations and the Soldiers of 'The Anarchy,'" *Albion* vol. 10, no. 4 (Winter, 1978), 300-318.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 311.

they were able to prosper to some degree. Although this contention will be discussed in chapter three, Callahan's articles provide useful arguments to consider when assessing the experience of the Fenland houses during Stephen's reign.

King Stephen

Of course, whether or not the Church was already changing, Stephen's reign was a remarkable time in English history as it occupies the interim between Henry I and Henry II, both of whom were known as competent and powerful kings; conversely, Stephen's reputation has been otherwise. Perhaps as a result of his failure to ensure his descendants inherited the throne, Stephen did not become the focus of a monograph until the well in to the twentieth century.

Stephen's first monograph attention arrived in 1966 when R. H. C. Davis's *King Stephen* was published. Based upon Davis's work on the third volume of the *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, this study presents Stephen as a weak king who inherited the personality of his father who fled the siege of Acre, "a man of great activity but little judgment."¹¹⁸ Davis paid some notice to the king's relationship with the Church and argued, like Brooke, "[i]n the course of the reign the Church had established a real ascendancy."¹¹⁹ Such a rise did not obviate recognition that the church had its bad moments. Davis regarded the arrest of the bishops as a breach between the king and the church that was damaging to both parties of the affair.¹²⁰ Stephen's interactions with Nigel of Ely, Abbot Walter of Ramsey, and Geoffrey de Mandeville are presented as leading to the troubles in the Fenland of 1143-1144.¹²¹ But Davis's study principally considers the church when discussing Stephen and Henry of Blois's difficulties imposing their nephew on the see of York later in Stephen's reign, the subordination of Savigny to Clairvaux, and Archbishop Theobald's inclination "to develop a policy of his own" rather than assenting to every royal wish.¹²² Davis quoted from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E's description of the horrors of Stephen's reign primarily to illuminate Geoffrey's wrongs. But he contradicted Round when he argued against locating "all these horrors of the so-called Anarchy ... to this one time and place."¹²³ Davis supported this proposed geographical and chronological extension of "the so-called Anarchy" by referencing "waste" in Henry II's early pipe rolls and other markers of Stephen's inability to

¹¹⁸ R. H. C. Davis, *King Stephen*, 3rd ed., (Harlow, 1990), 1-9, 36, 44-45, 73, 124.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 77-82.

¹²² Davis, *Stephen*, 3rd ed., chapter 9.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 82.

govern thoroughly.¹²⁴ This valuable study of Stephen and his reign will no doubt continue to shape views of twelfth-century England.

Davis's collaborator in editing Stephen's charters in the *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, H. A. Cronne, also wrote on Stephen and his reign. Each of Cronne's chapters could stand on its own, but together they present Stephen in a sympathetic but not uncritical light whilst arguing that his reign was a time of "anarchy in England."¹²⁵ Cronne stated that Stephen faced barons who wanted to reclaim "their inheritances ... just dues and ... proper rights" after Henry I's heavy-handed reign, and that the new king "lacked his uncle's presence," dealt poorly with crises, and wasted his chance of re-establishing his power in 1150-1153.¹²⁶ When considering how Stephen's reign affected the church, Cronne focused on the negative aspects. In a clearly pre-Yoshitake argument he stated that the arrest of the bishops led to "the alienation of the church" and "was a grievous breach ... of Stephen's Oxford charter of liberties."¹²⁷ Yet while acknowledging the real damages suffered by the church such as the burning of Fountains and Geoffrey's "dreadful barbarity," Cronne offered the suggestion that "a depth of understanding between feudal lords and ecclesiastics ... was often proof against the effects of violence."¹²⁸ He wanted historians to do a better job of considering how contemporaries felt about the wrongs; as long as the guilty party expressed penitence and sought to rectify the wrong, the offenses were mitigated.¹²⁹ This book offers valuable insights, although occasionally failing to use the most relevant sources.¹³⁰

David Crouch's study of Stephen's reign, like Davis's work, looks closely at "the character of Stephen as an explanation for the problems of his reign."¹³¹ Crouch's more sympathetic analysis presents Stephen as a notably good man but one without the "capacity to judge situations."¹³² In addition, Crouch argues that the reign was certainly not "anarchy"

¹²⁴ Davis, *Stephen*, 3rd ed., 82-86.

¹²⁵ Cronne, H. A., *The Reign of Stephen 1135-54: Anarchy in England* (London, 1970), 36, 40, 63, 69, 84, 94, 168, 233, et al. The survival of John Marshal as a child showcases how Stephen's personality might produce good results, but his weakness is a regular commentary.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 24, 233, 63.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 38, 94.

¹²⁸ Cronne, *Stephen*, 59, 54, 19.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹³⁰ When discussing the Geoffrey's rebellion, Cronne does not include Ramsey's own discussion of events, but considers the late twelfth-century account by William of Newburgh, as well as those by Henry of Huntingdon and the *Gesta Stephani*. *Ibid.*, 109.

¹³¹ David Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154* (Harlow, 2000), 7.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 340-341.

but rather civil war.¹³³ Stephen is shown as having almost completely “limited the war to ... a corner of his kingdom.”¹³⁴ This analysis may not do full justice to the scope of conflict in England from 1135-1154. Crouch does not want “to minimise the sufferings of ... the clergy,” but he does not discuss them at any length.¹³⁵ In his chapter focused on the church, Crouch argues that Stephen had a largely beneficial relationship with the church, perhaps because of his personal piety.¹³⁶ Regardless of the merits of this argument, Crouch seems convinced that Stephen’s poor reputation is principally due to poor press.¹³⁷

The most recent study of Stephen, Edmund King’s biography, offers a sympathetic appraisal of Stephen the man, although he is not convinced that the king managed to achieve his ends, “for fail he certainly did.”¹³⁸ King includes a considerable degree of turmoil throughout the kingdom in this failure.¹³⁹ Ultimately, he judges that Stephen was never fully lord of his land, England.¹⁴⁰ King presents his study as a biography of Stephen and largely advances it chronologically and not thematically. The Church receives attention in the episodes in which it played a significant role, and since Stephen himself was not a despoiler of church lands, the topic is scarcely commented upon. Of course, Geoffrey de Mandeville’s rebellion receives attention as a key incident of Stephen’s life.¹⁴¹ King also alludes to the burden on monastic houses when discussing “Regional Lordship” and how barons on both sides dominated their neighborhoods.¹⁴² While the focus of this work is on Stephen and not monastic life, King’s points about Stephen’s weaknesses do draw attention to his interaction with monasteries and how that interaction affected them. King argues that in Stephen’s view “the higher clergy were [his] men and they were not allowed to forget it.”¹⁴³ This judgment seems amply supported by Stephen’s interactions with Nigel of Ely and Walter of Ramsey.

¹³³ Crouch, *Stephen*, 1-7. While the contention that “anarchy” is a poor term to describe Stephen’s reign is reasonable, Crouch’s use of “civil war” or “civil wars” is less well explained. He claims that the warfare of Stephen’s reign should be associated with “two parties contesting the succession to the kingdom of England and the duchy of Normandy.” This binary presentation has little place for the conflict and upheaval resulting from cases such as the Earl of Chester’s claims to Lincoln, Geoffrey de Mandeville’s rebellion on behalf of his claimed castles, or Gilbert, Earl of Pembroke’s rebellion when he was not awarded his nephew’s castles. Crouch himself notes that “to attack the king was not necessarily to be working for the empress.” 211.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 341.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 295-319.

¹³⁷ “Whatever misfortunes Stephen experienced in his reign, they were as nothing to the damage done to his posthumous reputation by being the first victim of modern scientific history.” *Ibid.*, 342.

¹³⁸ Edmund King, *King Stephen* (New Haven and London: 2010), 320.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 332-333.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 339.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 191-199.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 206ff.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 306.

King's biography fulfills its job of presenting Stephen as a king who struggled to be more than a *primus inter pares*, a king who "never made his voice heard."¹⁴⁴

Anarchy and the Baronage

King's criticism of Stephen's failure to dominate his barons introduces a third major theme and question: what were the barons doing during Stephen's reign? While this question cannot be fully answered, historians have shifted in their views since the late nineteenth century when an unruly baronage was blamed for much of Stephen's trials.

Stephen's impotence is an underlying factor in J. H. Round's *Geoffrey de Mandeville*, a seminal work on the baronage and Stephen's reign. Round was focused on "feudalism gone mad" under Stephen.¹⁴⁵ He believed that the king needed to purchase "the adhesion of the turbulent and ambitious magnates" and so he granted them their requests for castles and honors.¹⁴⁶ Despite using the title "Lord and King," Stephen was forced to treat with the magnates as first among equals.¹⁴⁷ Stephen's bad fortune and "insatiable nobles" produced "the Anarchy."¹⁴⁸ Round's focus was not on the details of wrongs committed during Stephen's reign. He comments on events only when they interact with his thesis of rampant feudalism throughout the land. Because Geoffrey de Mandeville was the key example of the problems of Stephen's reign, the devastation reported from Ramsey and Ely received extensive coverage.¹⁴⁹ Round acknowledged the validity of the Peterborough version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E's description of the horrors of Stephen's reign, but only as "a picture which might thus be literally true of the chronicler's own district, while not necessarily applicable ... to the whole of Stephen's realm."¹⁵⁰ Round's analysis appropriately considers that sudden and violent wrongs to monastic houses were not the standard experience of monastic houses throughout Stephen's reign either chronologically or geographically; yet he fails to consider other troubling experiences such as either long-term depredation by barons, both great and petty, who misappropriated church lands, or the stress placed on monks, nuns, and peasants who feared what their local magnate might do if he should fall foul of the king. Nonetheless, Round's emphasis on Stephen's weakness and baronial rapacity cast a long shadow over scholarship of the reign.

¹⁴⁴ King, *Stephen*, 339.

¹⁴⁵ J. H. Round, *Geoffrey de Mandeville: A Study of the Anarchy* (London, 1892), 35.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴⁸ Round, *Geoffrey*, 36, 98, v.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 209-225.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 220.

In a work dependent on Round's shaping of the discussion of mediaeval England, Frank Stenton discussed feudalism in England from the Conquest through the *Cartae Baronum* and finished by presenting an *apologia* for the barons of Stephen's reign. He stated, "Baronial autonomy characteristic of Stephen's later years was the result ... of the unprecedented situation created by a disputed succession."¹⁵¹ In the midst of presenting a case removing prime culpability for the turmoil of the era from Round's overweening barons and baldly stating that "Stephen was chiefly responsible for his own failure," Stenton had little room to consider the state of the church.¹⁵² He acknowledged that the religious houses were affected by the war when considering baronial charters from the "*tempus werre*."¹⁵³ Stenton also found that the charters "illustrate ... the widespread devastation characteristic of the time" but doubted that charter evidence could compare to the value of chronicles when discussing "the miseries caused by the war."¹⁵⁴ Altogether, Stenton's study provides a limited but accurate consideration of the monastic experience. His shift in viewing barons from men seeking to dominate to ones trying to react has influenced future generations of historians.

Over the years since Stenton's work more has been written on the barons under Stephen's governance, or lack thereof. Edmund King's 1974 article "King Stephen and the Anglo-Norman Aristocracy" supports Stenton's contention quoted above and argues that the barons were simply reacting to Stephen's inability to keep the realm running smoothly.¹⁵⁵ King considered a range of barons, Miles of Gloucester, the Beaumont twins, Henry of Winchester, and Geoffrey de Mandeville. Although each made decisions aimed at improving his own situation, their aims were survival, not supremacy.¹⁵⁶ Paul Dalton has also written a number of articles which broadly agree with this thesis.¹⁵⁷ Dalton's research, focused on Ranulf of Chester, argues that barons sought to maximize their position in the midst of a tumultuous situation. The greatest of them, such as Ranulf and William, Earl of York, were willing to defy Stephen. Nonetheless, they were not attempting to overthrow him. Dalton

¹⁵¹ Frank Stenton, *The First Century of English Feudalism 1066-1166: being the Ford Lectures delivered in the University of Oxford in Hilary Term 1929, 2nd ed.*, (Oxford, 1961), 218-219.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 244-245.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 245-247.

¹⁵⁵ Edmund King, "King Stephen and the Anglo-Norman Aristocracy," *History*, Vol. 59, No. 196 (1974), 180-194.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 192-193.

¹⁵⁷ Paul Dalton, "William Earl of York and Royal Authority in Yorkshire in the Reign of Stephen," *Haskins Society Journal*, Vol. 2 (1990), 155-165; "Aiming at the impossible: Ranulf II Earl of Chester and Lincolnshire in the reign of Stephen," in *The Earldom of Chester and its Charters*, ed. A. T. Thacker (Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society, Vol. 71, 1991), 109-134; "*In Neutro Latere*: The Armed Neutrality of Ranulf II Earl of Chester in King Stephen's Reign," *Anglo Norman Studies*, 14 (1992), 39-59; "Eustace fitzJohn and the Politics of Anglo-Norman England: The Rise and Survival of a Twelfth Century Royal Servant," *Speculum*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (Apr., 1996), 358-383.

emphasized that even at the Battle of Lincoln which led to Stephen's capture, Ranulf was not fighting to aid Matilda's cause; he was, rather, attempting to claim what he viewed as his inheritance.¹⁵⁸

Barons are also seen in a somewhat self-serving light in articles on agreements during Stephen's reign. Edmund King's article "Dispute Settlement in Norman England" discusses how barons would use an agreement, *conventio*, rather than bring arguments to court.¹⁵⁹ King argued that this extra-judicial arrangement, although used throughout the Anglo-Norman period, has key examples from Stephen's reign.¹⁶⁰ Inasmuch as King presented the final agreement between Stephen and Henry fitz Empress as a *conventio*, he showed this practice to be of great significance in Stephen's reign.¹⁶¹ Throughout the article King emphasized the power of the barons as evidenced by their ability to arrange their world through agreements that they negotiate rather than by taking their disputes to their lord whose ruling could only be gainsaid with difficulty. Perhaps it was better to lose a bit in a quarrel with a neighbor than risk losing all if a judgment went against you. David Crouch took a slightly different though complementary tact in a study originating in a Norman *conventio*.¹⁶² Crouch argued that the Anglo-Norman baronage were principally looking after their own positions without consideration of the king. Crouch concluded by suggesting that later weakness of royal power exemplified by "bastard feudalism" were not so different from royal weakness under Stephen.¹⁶³ Although Crouch's focus on the king's weakness is somewhat different than King's argument about concord, both presented a world in which the king is only sometimes the last resort: quite often the barons settled their differences without recourse to royal justice.

These studies and others help to set this thesis in context. A significant portion of local sources reference wrongs committed on the Fenland houses by barons both great and middling. Geoffrey de Mandeville is of course the preeminent example, but he was not alone in his violence. Although this study is narrowly focused on the Fens, England as a whole was experiencing some of the same problems. Of course it has become a commonplace in studies of Stephen's reign to decry the idea of "the Anarchy." For example Graeme White's article "The Myth of the Anarchy" explicitly contends that the idea is overblown, simplistic, and

¹⁵⁸ Dalton, "Armed Neutrality," 43-46.

¹⁵⁹ Edmund King, "Dispute Settlement in Norman England," *Anglo-Norman Studies*, Vol. 14 (1992), 115-130.

¹⁶⁰ King, "Dispute Settlement," 115-116, 118-119.

¹⁶¹ King, "Dispute Settlement," 125.

¹⁶² David Crouch, "A Norman 'conventio' and bonds of lordship in the middle ages," in *Law and Government in Medieval England and Normandy*, eds. George Garnett and John Hudson (Cambridge, 1994), 299-324.

¹⁶³ Crouch, "Norman 'conventio,'" 320.

ignores counterevidence.¹⁶⁴ On the other hand, Hugh Thomas presents a vehement contention that Stephen's reign saw unprecedented disruption and that it should be considered "a deeply violent and disorderly period."¹⁶⁵ His essay defends clerical writers against charges of wildly exaggerating the unparalleled suffering of the time.¹⁶⁶ Although Thomas's argument considers the length and breadth of England, he cannot detail every relevant example. His maps do, however, consistently show problems in the Fens. Of course, it was not Thomas's point to analyze the Fenland sources in any detail, but his study suggests the value in so doing.

It is in light of these sources, both primary and secondary and the lingering questions that they present that this thesis will study the histories and documents from the Fenland houses. While the testimony of one Peterborough monk is repeatedly quoted to add color to histories of the reign, little has been done to examine his world in depth. This study will present a history of the Fenlands houses before, during, and after King Stephen's reign. It will show to what extent the houses suffered extraordinary wrongs during Stephen's reign and what role their prelates played in guiding the houses. Finally it will also consider how this evidence fits into the bigger themes of Church, King, and baronage during this tumultuous time.

¹⁶⁴ Graeme H. White, "The Myth of the Anarchy," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 22, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 2000), 323-337.

¹⁶⁵ Hugh M. Thomas, "Violent Disorder in King Stephen's England: A Maximum Argument," in *King Stephen's Reign (1135-1154)*, eds. Paul Dalton and Graeme J. White (Woodbridge, 2008), 139-170.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 141-142.

Chapter One: The Fenland houses Before Stephen

Introduction

When the Peterborough Chronicle laments the horrors of Stephen's reign and the sufferings of the country, its author implicitly suggests that the preceding reign or reigns were times of peace and prosperity. In fact, although lamenting the heavy tax placed upon Peterborough by William I and Henry I's demands, the chronicler makes the exact point in the entry for 1135 when he says of Henry I that he was "a good man and there was much fear of him. No man dared transgress against another in his time. He made peace for man and beast. Whoever was carrying his burden of gold and silver, no man dared say anything but good to him."¹⁶⁷ Of course such a contrast might well be a case of seeing the past through rosy lenses. But the new king's reign was associated with difficulties for England. Before considering what troubles afflicted the Fenland houses during Stephen's reign and how far from ordinary those sufferings might have been, some consideration must be afforded to the reigns of his grandfather and uncles. This chapter will consider the Fenland houses in Norman England before Stephen in three sections. First, it will examine what the Domesday record says about the houses. The most straightforward use of Domesday is to present the lands of the houses and their distribution prior to Stephen's reign. This information provides context for later complaints and cases. In addition, it also shows that monastic accounts of Stephen's reign were by monks aware of earlier depredation and violence: their houses had experienced many troubles in the aftermath of the Conquest. As a result, when twelfth-century monastic writers complained of egregious wrongdoing to their houses, it was with an understanding, albeit not firsthand, of this earlier suffering. Second, the chapter will discuss the abbots in order to have an overview of the Anglo-Norman period at each house and to show the sort of relationship that monks and abbots might have with each other. Furthermore, this section helps to show the general tenor of the years from the Conquest to Stephen's reign. During these years the abbeys' situation went from being threatened and imposed upon to being fairly settled and prosperous. Finally, continuing this last point, the chapter will consider the extent to which the houses were expanding their landholdings in the years closest to Stephen's accession. This overview will show that between the Conquest and the death of Henry I the houses underwent some trouble, but that the problems gradually diminished even if some difficulty in relations between monks and prelates remained.

¹⁶⁷ *ASC-E*, ed. Irvine, 133.

The Fenland Houses in Domesday

Domesday Book presents the basic information on the size and value of the Fenland houses in 1086. Of the four houses being considered, Ely, Ramsey, Peterborough and Thorney, Ely was the richest of the group, having properties with a value of about £740. Domesday lists around 235 properties as belonging to Ely, although some of these are in the same manor but with different tenants. Altogether the house had about 550 hides.¹⁶⁸ Although smaller than Ely, Ramsey and Peterborough had properties of similar values to each other. Ramsey's Domesday entries list sixty-five holdings in total and three hundred fifty-six hides. Together, Ramsey's holdings were valued at approximately £351.¹⁶⁹ Meanwhile, Peterborough had 106 entries. These were smaller on average than those of Ramsey with about 334 hides of land and a value of somewhat over £300.¹⁷⁰ This analysis obscures the fact that Peterborough's entries from Northamptonshire often list the same location twice, once for the abbey itself and once for a tenant. Domesday's division of the Northamptonshire holdings shows a practical separation while suggesting that the abbey's holdings as tenant-in-chief were more numerous than they were. In contrast to these three wealthy houses, Thorney was a relatively small abbey, holding only fifty-six hides over thirteen entries. These properties were worth around £55.¹⁷¹ This basic information shows some differences in the house's holdings that further discussion amplifies.

Each house's holdings were spread across several counties. Ely's lands were unevenly distributed and demonstrate a range of sizes and values in different counties. The average holding in Hertfordshire, Essex, Huntingdonshire, or Cambridge was larger and more valuable than that in Norfolk or Suffolk. For example, Ely had three Hertfordshire manors that brought in £50, but its 105 Suffolk holdings totaled only about £201. Cambridgeshire, home to Ely, contained sixty-three estates worth about £285. While the geographical spread of Ely's lands ensured that purely local problems would not undermine the house's financial well-being, it also meant that problems in any number of areas could potentially affect the abbey.

¹⁶⁸ Carucates are counted as hides in this evaluation. Sally Harvey, *Domesday: Book of Judgment* (Oxford, 2014), 76. My numbers do not perfectly align with those given by Miller, *Ely*, 16. The difference is 1066/TRE values versus 1086.

¹⁶⁹ These are my own calculations based off the Phillimore editions. Knowles gives £358 5s. *Monastic Order*, 2nd ed., 702.

¹⁷⁰ My figures concluded with a total of just shy of £307; Knowles gives the figure as £323, 8d; King presents the value as £317. Knowles, *Monastic Order*, 2nd ed., 702; King, *Peterborough*, 13. Hides are my calculation from Domesday. For the purpose of accounting, I equate a carucate with a hide, virgates are one quarter of a hide and bovates are one eighth. Each hide is made up of 120 acres.

¹⁷¹ One entry Sawbridge, is recorded in Northamptonshire but during the Middle Ages was commonly placed in Wolfhamcote, Warwickshire. Northamptonshire, 222v., Phillimore, 10.3 and "Notes."

Similarly, Ramsey's properties and rights were centered on Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire, but also extended into six other counties. Huntingdonshire was both physically and financially the heart of Ramsey's estates. Forty percent of its listed hides and almost fifty percent of its listed value lay in that county. Ramsey's second largest holdings occurred in Cambridgeshire that included another twelve estates with eighteen percent of the abbey's lands and a further seventeen percent of its income. The remaining holdings lay in the surrounding counties of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire, and Norfolk. Although these remaining holdings contributed slightly over thirty percent of Ramsey's Domesday valuation, the abbey was firmly centered on its two key counties. This left the abbey particularly vulnerable to unrest in Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire.

Peterborough's lands were principally located further north and west as the vast majority of its estates lay in Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire. The abbey had only ten holdings in Huntingdonshire, Bedfordshire, Leicestershire, and Nottinghamshire, and these amounted to only £37 10s., or slightly over ten percent of its valuation. Peterborough's four holdings in Huntingdonshire, £13 of the £37, lay just across the Nene from Peterborough and could perhaps be included geographically with the house's other lands close by in Northamptonshire. The abbey's Lincolnshire holdings composed about a third of its total holdings with just over eighty-nine hides worth £71. Northamptonshire had 199 and 5/8 hides that were valued at £198. Although Peterborough was a sister abbey to the other Fenland houses, the distribution of its estates gave it some geographical distance from the others.

Finally Thorney, the smallest of the houses, had lands across five counties, but these holdings were largely clustered together in Huntingdonshire's northern hundred of Normancross. Thorney had eight entries there that included almost forty-two of the house's fifty-six hides, over seventy-four percent of the abbey's entire holding. One entry in Cambridgeshire, Whittlesey, lies south of Thorney and just east of the house's properties in Huntingdonshire. Two other properties, Twywell, Northamptonshire and Bolnhurst, Bedfordshire, lay rather further from the house, about thirty miles away. The two furthest manors were Charwelton, Northamptonshire and Sawbridge, Warwickshire and they were about sixty miles from the house. The compact nature of most of Thorney's holdings likely made oversight easier.

Overall, in considering the various holdings of the four main houses recorded by Domesday, the spread of lands seems likely to help explain some problems the houses had both at the time of the Conquest and later. For example, some troubles seem to be more likely to correlate with geographic distribution than others. When fighting was localized, such as

the uprising of Hereward or Geoffrey de Mandeville's later rebellion, only houses heavily endowed in the location of the fighting would be disturbed. On the other hand the challenges of individuals making legal claim to lands would be unlikely to be centered geographically. For example the problem of heirs claiming lands donated by their parents was not particular to a specific county or region. Thus the lands recorded in Domesday can help to explain why certain houses reported more problems than others during the aftermath of the Conquest or during Stephen's reign, but geographic distribution is only part of the story.

Houses did not benefit from all the lands they held in Domesday because of the knight service due to the Norman kings. After the Conquest vast amount of lands were subtenanted to meet houses' *servitia debita*. Pre-1066 records show that houses often subtenanted their land, but afterwards the demand was higher. It may be that pre-Conquest records do not fully represent how much the houses were leasing, but the post-Hastings sources show that knights were settled on a great deal of monastic lands. The phenomenon of lands out of demesne reflects the extent to which houses were required to provide knights to the king.

Across all six counties, the majority of Ely's lands were demesne manors. A rough calculation makes 78.4% of manors demesne, 17.4% subtenanted, and 4.2% uncertain. Domesday contrasts demesne versus subtenant holdings in the church's first two recorded Cambridgeshire holdings, both in Stetchworth: "This land lay and lies in the lordship of the Church of Ely ... In the same village Hardwin de Scalers holds 1 virgate from the Abbot."¹⁷² Of course some lands that remained in demesne in the general sense were not in a house's agricultural demesne. For example in Stetchworth, even on land that "jacuit et jacet in dominio aecclesiae de Ely," only three and a half of eight and a half hides were in agricultural demesne. Villagers and smallholders tilled the rest for some form of rent. Thus, Domesday's categories of land as demesne or tenanted lands do not mean that demesne manors had no subtenants on them.

In contrast to Ely, less of Peterborough lands remained in demesne. In Northamptonshire the abbey's lands were divided into seventeen entries of the church's land and thirty-four of the church's men.¹⁷³ This clear notation of lands held by tenants of the house reflects the early establishment of knight service under Abbot Turolde, 1070-1098. Other counties did not mark the difference so sharply, but Domesday's entries show the

¹⁷² Cambridgeshire, 190v., Phillimore, 5.1 and 2. Domesday values are taken from the Phillimore edition. This family will be henceforth referred to as "de Scalers." "Scales," "Scalers," and "de Scalariis" are other versions.

¹⁷³ Northamptonshire, 221r-v., Phillimore, 6 and 6a.

heavy burden of Peterborough's knights.¹⁷⁴ Edmund King found that "forty-six per cent of the abbey's property was in the hands of its knights."¹⁷⁵ Although Peterborough was amongst the rich abbeys of England, it paid a heavy *servitia debita* beyond what might be expected.

Although Ramsey's service was far less heavy than that of either Peterborough or Ely, it too had much land out of demesne. Approximately twenty-one percent of its lands had a subtenant. These lands were spread across the abbey's holdings, but the larger estates seemed likely to remain in demesne. As in the case of Ely, even lands that were in the house's demesne had locals on the fields. For example in Hemingford Abbots, Huntingdonshire only two of the possible sixteen ploughs were in agricultural demesne.¹⁷⁶ A further eight were held by twenty-six villagers and five smallholders.

Almost all of Thorney's Domesday listings had no subtenant. Only the two farthest, Charwelton, Northamptonshire, and Sawbridge, Warwickshire, were not under the abbey's direct control. The two far properties were worth only £3 5s; not an inconsequential amount to such a small abbey, but of far less significance than the closer holdings. On the demesne estates much of the actual work was done by locals; nevertheless, the abbey was able to direct its own estates and not merely receive a rent. Overall, Domesday evidence shows Thorney to be a small but centralized house whose lands spread west out of the Fens. Although the house could not compare in property to its larger Fenland neighbors, it was by no means impoverished. Furthermore the proximity of its more valuable properties offered easy access to oversight to ensure that the house's resources were well husbanded.

In addition to showing the amount and geographical distribution of the lands held by houses, Domesday is useful in showing that the houses continued to combat the loss of lands and men some two decades after Hastings. These long-term effects of the Conquest demonstrated in Domesday might help to partially explain why the Fenland monks reacted so strongly to troubles of Stephen's reign: civil instability posed both immediate and persisting threats to a house's well-being. Although acute troubles such as seized livestock might be quickly rectified, claims to lands reverberated on. As Robin Fleming's work on Domesday demonstrates, many of that record's entries give evidence of legal claims concerning lands and men.¹⁷⁷ The Fenland houses shared in this culture of conflicting claims and possessions.

¹⁷⁴ Leicestershire, 231r., Phillimore, 5.2; Lincolnshire, 345v., Phillimore, 8.4, and 346r., Phillimore, 8.22; Huntingdonshire 205r., Phillimore, 8.3-4, etc.

¹⁷⁵ King, *Peterborough*, 13-14.

¹⁷⁶ Huntingdonshire, 204v., Phillimore 6.16.

¹⁷⁷ Robin Fleming, *Domesday Book and the law: Society and legal custom in early medieval England* (Cambridge, 1998).

The Domesday entries that refer to legal disputes show significant variation between houses and counties.¹⁷⁸ Ely appears in 184 entries or slightly over sixty-six percent of the entries referring to disputes involving the four Fenland houses. Ramsey, the next most represented had sixty-two entries or twenty-two percent. Peterborough's twenty-six entries and Thorney's six suggest, but certainly do not prove, that both houses had few ongoing complaints in 1086. The complaints were also unbalanced geographically. Some of the variation may be due to different levels of reporting between Domesday circuits. Fleming's analysis finds far more cases in Little Domesday or Circuit VII, Essex, Norfolk, and Suffolk, than in any other circuit.¹⁷⁹ Sally Harvey notes that Little Domesday is "less-condensed" than Great Domesday, and this difference likely influences disagreements about holdings mentioning the Fenland houses since the three Circuit VII counties are amongst those counties with the most complaints.¹⁸⁰ Suffolk had the most, eighty-four. Cambridgeshire and Norfolk each had almost sixty, whilst Essex, Huntingdonshire, and Lincolnshire had about 20 each. Six counties with fewer holdings by the houses had few complaints. Bedfordshire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, and Nottinghamshire had four or fewer a piece. There is clearly correlation between houses and the location of the complaints. Ely and Ramsey both had holdings in Cambridgeshire and the counties of East Anglia, whilst Thorney and Peterborough's holdings lay mainly north and west of Cambridgeshire. Although some difference might be ascribed to the higher level of detail recorded in Circuit VII, this does not explain the many complaints recorded in Cambridgeshire. However, it is not certain what the Domesday data proves. Perhaps Little Domesday's editing left more detail of complaints in its record. On the other hand it may be that those counties had more wrongful seizures, and Ely and Ramsey were simply unfortunate in where their houses were endowed. In either case the two houses that recorded the most wrongs in Domesday were also to suffer disproportionately in the troubles of Stephen's reign.

The claimed wrongs recorded in Domesday vary from case to case. In some cases land had been wrongfully seized. For example Eustace, sheriff of Huntingdon "forcefully took possession" of Isham, Northamptonshire, according to Ramsey's protestation.¹⁸¹ In another case Aubrey de Vere seized lands at Yelling and Hemmingford, Huntingdonshire,

¹⁷⁸ I have used *Domesday Book and the law* as a sourcebook for raw data.

¹⁷⁹ Circuit VII gives 1,423 cases whilst Circuit III, Middlesex, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, and Bedfordshire, has only 261. Fleming, *Domesday Book*, xviii-xix.

¹⁸⁰ Harvey, *Domesday*, 7.

¹⁸¹ Northamptonshire, 228r., Phillimore 55.1.

that reportedly belonged to the abbey, but which had in 1066 been held for life from Ramsey by one Aelfric.¹⁸² Following Aelfric's death at Hastings, Ramsey's brief resumption of the lands was ended when de Vere took possession of them from the house. Of course, it is possible that de Vere believed Aelfric to have been tenant-in-chief and that he had some rightful claim to the lands.

The question of who was the rightful pre-Conquest tenant seems to have been confusing after Hastings. In Yaxham, Norfolk, Ely had to reclaim its right to overlordship of Roger Bigot from King William himself.¹⁸³ In another case apparently due to a question of antecessorship, Ely permanently lost its manor of Ditton, Cambridgeshire to the king.¹⁸⁴ Archbishop Stigand had presumably gained possession of the land when he held Ely in plurality, and after the Conquest William held on to the property despite Ely's protestations that Stigand had not been tenant-in-chief.¹⁸⁵ Thorney also lost land due to a question of antecessorship. Domesday Book records that Thorney claimed six of the nine hides held by Countess Judith in Conington, Huntingdonshire.¹⁸⁶ The abbey argued that the previous tenant, Thorkell, paid the abbey an unknown amount for it but was only a subtenant; in addition, the jurors backed up Thorney's case and testified that the remaining three hides were due to the abbey upon Thorkell's death.¹⁸⁷ The land, however, remained with Judith and her descendants.¹⁸⁸

In East Anglia many of the wrongs involved the loss of sokemen or men commended to the houses rather than the loss of land. For example, in Norfolk, Ramsey suffered from loss of men, not specifically claims against its land. William of Warenne was twice listed as holding men who should have belonged to Ramsey, and in Ludham, Count Alan had wrongfully gained nineteen of the abbey's sokemen and their carucate of land.¹⁸⁹ The count had also claimed freemen from Ely in Suffolk. In Wantisden eight freemen in the abbey's commendation and soke had been subsumed into Alan's demesne.¹⁹⁰ These detailed Domesday complaints demonstrate the familiarity of the Fenland houses with losing lands during politically unsettled times.

¹⁸² Huntingdonshire, 208r., Phillimore D:7 and 207r., Phillimore 22.1-2.

¹⁸³ Norfolk, 214v., Phillimore, 15.22.

¹⁸⁴ Cambridgeshire 189v., Phillimore, 1.11.

¹⁸⁵ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. II, ch. 98, p. 168.

¹⁸⁶ Huntingdonshire, 206v., Phillimore, 20.1; 208v, Phillimore, D26; also *RB Thorney* ii, 375r which explains the case in more detail.

¹⁸⁷ This testimony was weakened by the acknowledgement that it was hearsay.

¹⁸⁸ *VCH Huntingdonshire*, iii, 146-147.

¹⁸⁹ Norfolk, 215r., Phillimore 16.1; 215v., Phillimore 16.5; 150r., Phillimore, 4.51.

¹⁹⁰ Suffolk, 296r., Phillimore, 3.86.

Domesday also suggests the types of opponents the abbeys faced in 1086, an interesting point of comparison with those who create problems during Stephen's reign. The abbey's most common opponents were powerful men, and, in the case of Countess Judith, a powerful woman. Several tenants in chief who clashed with the abbeys were sheriffs such as the infamous Picot of Cambridge, Roger Bigot, and Ralph Baynard. Some of those who apparently wronged the houses, William of Warenne, Hugh de Montfort, Odo of Bayeux, and Walter Giffard, were among those named as companions of William I at the Conquest. Other notable landowners whose claims clashed with the abbeys were Count Alan Rufus, Countess Judith, Eudo Dapifer, and Geoffrey de Mandeville. Beyond comprising a who's who of Anglo-Norman England, this list demonstrates that religious houses suffered from competing claims of ownership well after the initial land settlement following the Conquest. Although violence and war exacerbated uncertainties about legal land tenure, the effects lived into times of relative peace and stability as shown by claims in 1086 looking back at the aftermath of 1066. Furthermore, once a claim was made on land, the claimant, perhaps more commonly when he had power and influence to back him, was hard to dislodge.

Of course, Domesday, like all sources, has its biases. Robin Fleming argues persuasively that the jurors whose words underlie Domesday were likely swayed by their lords, many of whom wanted to hold on to lands that they believed or wanted to be theirs.¹⁹¹ This point is underscored by Fleming's observation that the avaricious Picot of Cambridge had no recorded complaints in four hundreds that testified in his presence.¹⁹² Although the malleability of jurors' truth may have often harmed the abbeys, in some cases the reverse may be true. The abbots of Ely and Ramsey were themselves lords of jurors and may have benefitted from a favorable recollection of rightful tenure.¹⁹³

This brief foray into Domesday disputes suggests one major conclusion. Questions of land tenure were rarely a settled issue even in Domesday Book itself. Of course, many properties were untroubled by recorded disputes. Some abbeys had more complaints and some fewer. But every house was troubled by the loss of possessions that it viewed as its own. While this is not a point of contention, it is a significant fact to keep in mind when considering later wrongs as it shows that extraordinary situations can raise a substantial number of complaints of dispossession. The Conquest certainly was such a situation and the Fenland monks during and after Stephen's reign faced another time of troubles.

¹⁹¹ Fleming, *Domesday Book*, 17-28.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁹³ Fleming, *Domesday Book*, 24-25.

Abbots

In the years between the disruption of the Conquest and Stephen's accession, the Fenland houses had a variety of experiences under new abbots, and several themes emerge. Kings granted abbeys to foreign abbots, abbots were deposed, and many abbots oversaw some diminution of abbatial demesne. This section will discuss the three above themes while noting changes over the years. In so doing it will also consider the degree of disruption experienced by the Fenland houses whilst so much change was being imposed upon them by royal authority. Exploring what occurred in the Fenland houses in the years before Stephen and considering the degree of turmoil or peace existing in 1135 will help to better evaluate how disruptive the years of Stephen's reign were to these monasteries.

After the Conquest the Fenland abbacies, like others across England, were methodically, but not hastily, filled with non-English abbots.¹⁹⁴ William I did not always force out native abbots, even those of questionable loyalty. For example, the quickest imposition seems to have been at Thorney where around 1068 William placed Folcard of Saint-Bertin to oversee the abbey.¹⁹⁵ The king was able to take this action relatively easily because Thorney seems to have been without a consecrated abbot following the death of Leofric at the time of the Conquest. Leofric, who also held Peterborough, Crowland, Burton, and Coventry, had apparently appointed a Dane, Siward, as provost of Thorney.¹⁹⁶ There is no clear evidence whether Siward died, fled, or was expelled before William's replacement. In any case when Folcard arrived no removal was recorded, only that of an insertion of a monk loyal to the new king. Folcard remained at Thorney for sixteen years although his status was never that of abbot but perhaps vice-abbot or acting abbot.¹⁹⁷ Peterborough likewise saw a quick change after the Conquest. Abbot Brand received the abbacy in the immediate uncertainty following Hastings. When he died in 1069, he was replaced by the militant Tuold of Fécamp. William transferred Tuold from Malmesbury where he had placed the Norman monk shortly after the Conquest.¹⁹⁸ In contrast to the changes at Thorney and Peterborough, Abbot Thurstan of Ely was allowed to remain there until his death in c. 1072 despite that abbey's connection with anti-Norman forces in the years after the Conquest and William's alleged desire "to substitute in his place a monk [named Theodwine]

¹⁹⁴ Knowles, *Monastic Order*, 2nd ed., 111.

¹⁹⁵ David Knowles, C. N. L. Brooke, and Vera C. M. London eds., *The Heads of Religious Houses England and Wales I. 940-1216*, 2nd ed., 74; Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History* vol. vi, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford, 1978), 150-151.

¹⁹⁶ Knowles, et al. *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 74; *CMR* i, 188.

¹⁹⁷ He is called "viceabbas," *RB Thorney* ii, 416r; Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 74.

¹⁹⁸ Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 55, 60.

Gemesciens.”¹⁹⁹ According to the *Liber Eliensis*, a rather biased source, Thurstan’s wisdom and probity saved his office for him. Meanwhile at Ramsey, Abbot Alfwin remained in office until his death in c. 1079.²⁰⁰ Even then William replaced Alfwin with a native English monk, Aelsi, and it was not until 1087 that Ramsey gained a non-English abbot.²⁰¹

William’s actions in replacing the English Fenland abbots suggests that he was either convinced of their loyalty or relatively unconcerned that they could harm him. Only in the case of Siward at Thorney did the head of a house leave, and without more evidence there is no way to know whether or not that was the result of William’s actions. Although the change from native to foreign abbots was likely unsettling, in the Fens William was not unreasonably disruptive. The Conqueror did not destabilize the Fenland houses by interfering with their prelates. This restraint contrasts with Stephen’s relationship with the prelates of Ely and Ramsey that will be discussed in chapter two.

A second major theme is the subsequent removal of abbots. Of the twenty men who were acting or consecrated abbots after the Conquest and before Stephen’s reign, five, not including Siward of Thorney, were removed from office. The earliest removed was Siward’s successor, Folcard of Saint Bertin. According to Orderic Vitalis, Folcard’s career as abbot of Thorney was cut short because of “certain quarrels between himself and the bishop of Lincoln.”²⁰² Thorney’s *Red Book* does not comment on this disagreement, but assigns Folcard’s degradation to Lanfranc’s action at a council at Gloucester.²⁰³ While Lanfranc could have acted to remove an abbot who was troubling his diocesan, in a recent article, J. R. Maddicott steps away from Orderic’s allegation and associates Folcard’s removal with the response of William and Lanfranc to the threat of Danish invasion in 1085.²⁰⁴ While this seems a more plausible cause for his dismissal than an unspecified disagreement with Bishop Remigius, there is no clear explanation of why William would not be able to depend upon the prelate whom he himself had named. Perhaps, if Maddicott is correct about the removal happening with a potential invasion on the horizon, the king needed an abbot with an aptitude for administration rather than one skilled as a hagiographer and composer. Ultimately, the

¹⁹⁹ Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 45; “rex ... loco eius monachum quendam Gemescientem cupiens subrogare...” *LE*, ed. Blake, bk II, ch. 112, p. 195.

²⁰⁰ Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 61.

²⁰¹ Herbert Losinga was from southern Normandy. Christopher Harper-Bill, “Losinga, Herbert de (d. 1119),” *ODNB* (2004) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17025>, accessed 20 November 2018], 1; Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 62.

²⁰² “Quibusdam simultatibus inter ipsum et Lincolnensem episcopum.” Orderic Vitalis, vol. vi, ed. Chibnall, 150-151.

²⁰³ *RB Thorney* ii, 416r.

²⁰⁴ J. R. Maddicott, “Responses to the Threat of Invasion, 1085” in *English Historical Review*, vol. 122, no. 498 (Sep., 2007), 986-997, 991.

facts behind Folcard's removal remain elusive. His successor, Gunter of Le Mans, who had been a monk of Battle Abbey and archdeacon of Salisbury, seems to have served well at Thorney and provided the monks of Thorney twenty-seven years of stable abbatial leadership.²⁰⁵

Some years later under Anselm, three more Fenland abbots were deposed at once: Godric of Peterborough, Aldwin of Ramsey, and Richard of Ely. Their depositions happened at a council at Westminster in September 1102.²⁰⁶ Godric's removal seems to be a straightforward case of simony: the abbey had paid the king for the right of free election.²⁰⁷ Aldwin may well be a similar case, as supported by both Hugh Candidus and Eadmer.²⁰⁸ On the other hand, simony was not Richard of Ely's problem. Eadmer notes that his removal was for a different, unspecified cause, and the *Liber Eliensis* claims that Henry I objected to what he viewed as Richard's lordly attitude stemming from his descent from the Clares and Giffards.²⁰⁹ The abbot seems then to have been paying the price for political ambition in his removal. In any case, Richard immediately sought papal redress, regained the abbacy, and directed his energies towards the new church building.²¹⁰ Aldwin of Ramsey also gained papal favor but was not reinstated at Ramsey for five years because Bernard, a monk from St. Albans, had been installed as soon as Aldwin was deposed.²¹¹

The last Fenland abbot to be removed between the Conquest and Stephen was Henry of Poitou, abbot of Peterborough, whose hostile relationship with the monks of Peterborough was ended when Henry I followed the advice of Bishops Roger of Salisbury and Alexander of Lincoln and dismissed him.²¹² The case of Henry of Poitou differs from those of the other abbots removed from office in that local records state him to be a problematic abbot. The other four who were removed seem to have been welcomed by their houses, or at least not hated. For example in Peterborough, Godric was certainly the monks' choice and Richard

²⁰⁵ Orderic Vitalis, vol. vi, ed. Chibnall, 150-153.

²⁰⁶ Whitelock, Dorothy, M. Brett, C. N. L. Brooke, eds., *Councils & Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church I A. D. 871-1204. Part II 1066-1204* (Oxford, 1981), 674-675.

²⁰⁷ Hugh Candidus, 86; Hollister argued that Anselm deposed Godric not for simony but in order to intrude a reforming abbot into Peterborough. Although this is possible, there is no proof. Furthermore Hollister suggested that because Anselm did not always value free election – he named his own successor at Bec – his objection to Godric's simony was disingenuous. This argument seems a bit weak. One might reasonably approve of the choice of an abbot by some means other than free election whilst still objecting to the exchange of money. C. Warren Hollister, "St Anselm on Lay Investiture," *Anglo-Norman Studies X* (Woodbridge, 1988), 145-158.

²⁰⁸ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 86; Whitelock et al. *Councils & Synods*, 674-675.

²⁰⁹ Whitelock et al. *Councils & Synods*, 675; *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. II, ch. 142, pp. 226-227.

²¹⁰ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. II, ch. 143, pp. 227-228.

²¹¹ *CAR*, 341; Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 62.

²¹² *ASC-E*, ed. Irvine, 127-133; Cecily Clark's study of Abbot Henry's career clarifies the *Chronicle's* one-sided account. Clark, " 'This Ecclesiastical Adventurer': Henry of Saint-Jean d'Angely," *The English Historical Review*, vol. 84, no. 332 (Jul., 1969), 548-560.

was well spoken of by the *Liber Eliensis*. On the other hand Henry of Poitou is recorded as falsely accusing the monks of Peterborough and attempting to subject the house to Cluny: his removal was not criticized in Peterborough.²¹³

Local sources do not generally comment on the effect of the removal of abbots, but it must have been somewhat destabilizing. This is particularly true in Peterborough. Godric's replacement was Matthew Ridel, brother of a royal justice, Geoffrey, and he served only one year as abbot before dying.²¹⁴ A four-year vacancy then followed, and the next abbot, Ernulf, was promoted from Peterborough to become Bishop of Rochester.²¹⁵ In contrast to Peterborough, none of the other three houses suffered as much turnover in leadership, and, particularly after the wave of depositions in 1102, the other houses were largely stable. Overall, in the forty years following the Conquest, the Fenland houses initially lacked long-term stability of leadership, but they became increasingly settled in the years leading up to Stephen's reign.

A third theme emerging from the post-Conquest Fenland houses is that of lands lost from demesne to tenants.²¹⁶ Especially because prelates during Stephen's reign were accused of this act, it is worthwhile to consider the reasons for earlier grants of monastic demesne. In each house it seems that abbots granted lands to knights and family members against the desire of the abbey's monks. Some of the wrongs should certainly be associated with national policies outwith an abbot's control, even if in the monks' eyes the abbot was actively culpable. For example, at Peterborough Abbot Turolde was reviled for his part in settling knights on abbey lands. Although Turolde might have gained approbation from Peterborough's monks when he managed to regain the house's relics from Ramsey by threatening to burn that abbey, he also "wickedly disposed of lands and gave them to his family members and knights who had come with him."²¹⁷ Turolde's actions might be largely attributed to post-Conquest necessities, but his arrival as an outsider with a band of knights whom he settled on abbey lands makes him seem to be more of an active agent dispossessing demesne lands rather than an abbot who had no choice but to plant tenants on his church's lands.

²¹³ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 103; *ASC-E*, Irvine, ed., 133.

²¹⁴ Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 60.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹⁶ Whether these losses point to a post-Conquest imposition of knight service and *servitia debita* is discussed elsewhere such as John Gillingham, "The Introduction of Knight Service into England," *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values* (Woodbridge, 2000), 187-208; and Nicholas Brooks, "The Archbishop of Canterbury and the so-called Introduction of Knight Service into England," *Anglo-Norman Studies XXXIV* (Woodbridge, 2012), 41-62.

²¹⁷ Terras ... male distraxit et dedit eas parentibus et militibus suis qui cum eo uenerant. *HC*, ed. Mellows, 84.

Rather later, Abbot Matthew Ridel, though only serving one year, farmed a valuable manor, Pytchley, to his brother, Geoffrey Ridel.²¹⁸ This case was a personal decision rather than due to any necessity of performing knight service. However, Abbot Matthew may not have been acting simply from a personal desire to benefit his family. Since his brother was a royal justice, this grant of tenancy may have been a way of pleasing the king by benefiting his servant. After Geoffrey Ridel's death in the *White Ship*, Henry's restoration of the manor states that his justice had held it from himself.²¹⁹ Matthew may not have had much choice if the lease was to fulfill the king's pleasure.

In Ely some losses seem to have occurred under Abbot Thurstan who cursed the malefactors, yet the *Liber Eliensis* principally places the settlement of knights to the time of Abbot Simeon, 1082-1093.²²⁰ According to the *Liber* it was against Simeon's will that he oversaw the settlement of knights on Ely's lands.²²¹ Meanwhile, Ramsey and Thorney lack narrative accounts which might denounce abbatial action, but other evidence suggests that lands were lost from demesne during the reigns of all the Norman kings. At Ramsey, Abbot Reginald either granted out lands or formalized their tenancy.²²² Two cases in particular show the abbot gaining knight service for the abbey. Reginald granted Barnwell, Northamptonshire to Reginald Monachus for one hundred shillings a year and the service of one knight.²²³ Abbot Reginald, repeating his predecessor's grants, also granted Guy of Eu land in Ringstead, Norfolk and Stowe, Cambridgeshire for knight service.²²⁴ Meanwhile the monks of Thorney were concerned that Folcard would grant lands to his family members and so arranged for Earl Waltheof to become their tenant.²²⁵

All in all, it seems that some cases, such as Thurstan and Simeon at Ely, were mainly dealing with the post-Conquest arrangement of how to provide knight service. As the years passed, abbots such as Matthew Ridel of Peterborough and Gunter of Thorney granted lands to family members without the necessity of providing knights. This practice of favoring relations seems to have been common throughout the period. Taken altogether, the evidence is largely anecdotal without enough detail to construct a case for how badly all the losses

²¹⁸ In Domesday Pytchley was subtenanted to one Azo. It was recorded at five hides and one virgate, and its value was £5. Northamptonshire, 222r., Phillimore, 6a.25.

²¹⁹ *RRAN* ii, no. 1244.

²²⁰ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. II, ch. 112, p. 195; ch. 134, pp. 216-217; ch. 137, pp. 220-221.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, bk. II, ch. 134, pp. 216-217.

²²² *CAR* iii, 128 ff.; ii, 259-265; iii, 272 and 301.

²²³ *CMR* ii, 259-260. The descendants of Reginald Monachus held the land until the late thirteen century. *VCH Northamptonshire* iii, 73.

²²⁴ *CMR* ii, 261-262; Guy is noted in Ramsey's Cambridgeshire entry but not that of Norfolk. *Cambridgeshire*, 192v., Phillimore, 7.2; *Norfolk* 215v., Phillimore, 16.5.

²²⁵ *RB Thorney* ii, 375r.

infringed upon every house's holdings. In the case of Peterborough, the Fenland house with the best records of knights being settled, Edmund King found that although the losses were heavy, Hugh Candidus had overestimated the house's losses to endow its sixty knights.²²⁶ Ely, though far richer than Peterborough, owed only forty knights to the king whilst Ramsey owed four. However, all three houses did lose valuable lands from their demesne in order to support their knights. Thorney escaped without owing knight service.²²⁷

Beyond the common themes of abbatial change, Ely in particular underwent a unique transformation. One of the richest of England's monasteries, it had long fought against subordination to the bishop of Lincoln. When Richard, descendent of both the Clare and Giffard families was abbot, he proposed an elevation of Ely's status. Under this plan, the abbey would be transformed into a monastic cathedral and the abbot into the bishop of a new diocese comprising the Isle of Ely and Cambridgeshire.²²⁸ Although Richard died before his plan could reach fruition, the idea gained traction. After Richard's death in 1107, Henry appointed Hervey, the displaced Bishop of Bangor, to administer the abbey during its vacancy.²²⁹ Hervey pursued the plan for a new episcopal see and became the first Bishop of Ely in 1109.²³⁰ Unfortunately for the monks, the abbey's change into a bishopric did not result in their controlling a puppet bishop. Instead, Hervey granted some lands (reportedly insufficient) to the monks and enjoyed his new position.²³¹ Even so, the *Liber* withholds posthumous condemnation and claims that Hervey had a respectable and devout death unlike his successor, Nigel.²³²

The houses' abbatial experience in the years between the Conquest and Stephen's accession demonstrate how houses might be disturbed through the introduction of foreign abbots, the deposing of abbots, and abbots granting out lands. This period also shows how the houses became more settled over the years. Houses began to receive some abbots with local connections such as Richard of Ely whose family, although of Norman descent, had become rooted in Cambridgeshire and East Anglia, and Martin of Bec who served as Prior of St Neots

²²⁶ King, *Peterborough*, 13-16.

²²⁷ Knowles suggests that this is because Leofric of Peterborough held Thorney in plurality at the Conquest. *Monastic Order*, 2nd ed., 609. Raban suggests in her thesis that the omission was merely Thorney's good fortune and not a royal plan. Raban, "Property of Thorney and Crowland," 39-40.

²²⁸ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. II, ch. 141, pp. 225-226. These lands were part of the then massive diocese of Lincoln.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 1, pp. 245-246. According to the *Liber Eliensis*, Hervey's furtherance of Richard's scheme occurred without the monks' knowledge.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 1-6, pp. 245-250.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 25, pp. 261-262.

²³² Hervey's death lacked only the completion of taking the habit to have completely endeared him to the monks. "Et ne quisquam de transitu eius modo sit dubius, sepe confessus et celesti viatico munitus iii. Kl. Septembris emigravit." *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 41, p. 279.

before being transferred to Peterborough. Towards the end of Henry I's reign, only one Fenland abbot was deposed, and that seems to have been partly in response to his poor relationship with his monks. The houses were also less troubled by the granting out of lands to pay their knight service. Although abbots continued to favor their relations, the substantial losses took place before the accession of Henry I. The houses might continue to remember the lands subtenanted to knights, but they were no longer hemorrhaging holdings. By the end of Henry I's reign the Fenland houses seem to have come to peace with the new regime.

Acquisitions in The Years Before Stephen

Beyond these broad overviews of the post-Conquest years, it is worthwhile to look more closely at land acquisition and retention in the last years before the death of Henry I. This information helps demonstrate the experience of the Fenland houses that the monks alleged to be so different from the years of Stephen's reign. In the last years before Henry's death the houses were still receiving some new lands, though generally in small amounts²³³ With the exception of Thorney under Abbot Robert de Prunelai (1113-1151), and Ramsey under Reginald (1114-1130), the four houses experienced little growth in the years leading into Stephen's reign.

All Benedictine houses, not only those in the Fens, were affected by a lack in donations towards the end of the reign of Henry I. Knowles commented on the growth of "reformed monastic and canonical life" during Henry I's later reign.²³⁴ This growth came at the expense of those Benedictine houses that donors seemed no longer to find to be attractive recipients of gifts. Martin Brett noted that even bishops – he focused on seculars ones – preferred supporting foundations of Augustinian canons.²³⁵

Nevertheless, during the early twelfth century, houses did manage to increase their holdings, although only rarely in any substantial way. This section will first consider gifts to the four Fenland houses. It will then look at increases in holdings that came at a cost, such as the payment for reacquisition or quitclaim, the expense of a substantial counter-gift, or the outright purchase of land. Of course, transactions that are presented as gifts might have concealed a purchase or the settlement of a dispute. This study will be careful to note any recorded payment that might indicate that a gift was more complicated than it seemed.

²³³ Emma Cownie's study of Anglo-Norman giving to monastic houses agrees with this general presentation. "The Fenland Houses," in *Religious Patronage in Anglo-Norman England 1066-1135* (Woodbridge, 1998), 109-128.

²³⁴ Knowles, *Monastic Order*, 2nd ed., 174.

²³⁵ Martin Brett, *The English Church Under Henry I* (London, 1975), 138.

Gifts

During Henry's reign the houses in the Fenland did not receive many new gifts. As the richest by far of the houses, Ely may have needed fewer further grants than the less well endowed houses.²³⁶ It also underwent much change and internal unrest in its mutation from an abbey to a cathedral with a monastic priory. As a result, it certainly shows little sign of making gains during the early twelfth century as neither episcopal documents nor the *Liber Eliensis* bear record to increases in the house's holdings. Nigel's acta, a better source for episcopal donations than gifts from other donors, records no gifts likely to have been received during Henry I's reign.²³⁷ Similarly, Peterborough's abbatial records do not have even a single donation during the early prelate of Abbot Martin of Bec. In fact, during the whole of Martin's abbacy Peterborough records only note one clear example of a gift, and it dates from 1147, past the worst troubles of Stephen's reign.²³⁸

Although Abbot Reginald of Ramsey proved adept at increasing his house's lands, under Abbot Walter, Ramsey gained only one grant.²³⁹ However, unlike Ely and Peterborough's, it was significant. Through this grant Ramsey gained lordship of Woodwalton, Huntingdonshire, in two steps. Two charters mark the first step, one by Walter of Bolbec, the tenant-in-chief, and the second by his tenant, Albreda daughter of Remelin, and widow of Eustace of Sellea.²⁴⁰ Sometime between August and December 1134, Albreda gave the manor of Woodwalton to Ramsey in pure and perpetual alms for the good of her soul, her husband's and that of her ancestors'. She notes that the monks should have the land "from her and all her heirs."²⁴¹ She ensured that the charter was assented to by Walter of Bolbec, the land's tenant-in-chief, his son and heir, Hugo, and her own son and heir, Eustace.²⁴² A considerable number of witnesses – twenty-one to be exact– were named and many others were present. Albreda's charter is preceded in the cartulary by that of Walter of Bolbec. It notes that Abbot Walter and his successors will hold Woodwalton from Walter of Bolbec "for the service of two knights," that the monks will owe a relief of ten silver marks when Abbot Walter "dies or changes his life," and that Walter's successor will owe the same

²³⁶ Knowles, *Monastic Order*, 2nd ed., 702-703.

²³⁷ *EEA* 31, no. 47. The one possible gift is dated by Karn 1133 x 30 May 1169. But he notes that it should be placed "towards the end of Bp Nigel's episcopate by the witnesses." Aside from Wigar's gift, Nigel's acta only gives one other example of a gift to Ely. The gift of land in Hadham from one William of Stapleford must date from the last decade of Nigel's prelate. *EEA* 31, no. 48.

²³⁸ *Swaffham*, 115r.

²³⁹ In 1123 x 1130, Henry I gave a charter confirming Reginald's acquisitions. *CMR* i, 243-244.

²⁴⁰ *CMR* i, 155-156.

²⁴¹ "Quietum et absolutum a me et ab omnibus heredibus meis." *CMR* i, 155.

²⁴² "De cujus feudo fuit ipsum manerium." *CMR* i, 155.

relief.²⁴³ Abbot Walter secured the agreement by means of two knights to fulfill the service, namely Hoverwinus and Henry of Whiston. The charter continues to spell out at length the abbot and abbey's subordinate rights and ends with eight named witnesses: five on Walter of Bolbec's behalf and three from the abbot.

Woodwalton continues to appear in abbey charters. At some point fairly soon after the initial donation by Albreda, Walter of Bolbec issued a new charter regarding Woodwalton in which he quitclaimed it to Abbot Walter and Ramsey²⁴⁴ Fourteen named witnesses, and many unnamed, testified to this grant. Charters of his wife, Helewise, and his son and heir, Hugo, affirming the gift accompany Walter of Bolbec's charter.²⁴⁵ Henry I also granted a charter of confirmation.²⁴⁶ This gift, a considerable donation, shows that on occasion even an old Benedictine foundation in the Fens could receive a major gift.²⁴⁷ It may be that Walter de Bolbec was willing to grant the manor in its entirety because of pre-Conquest history. His father held Woodwalton from someone identified as Earl William in Domesday, but the pre-Conquest tenant was one Saxi.²⁴⁸ Ramsey's *Chronicon Abbatiae* records that Saxi, a relative of Earl Leofric, had been granted the possession of *Westmilne*, presumably Westmill, Hertfordshire, under the conditions that upon his death both it and his land of Walton would be Ramsey's demesne.²⁴⁹ Although Walter de Bolbec's charters do not mention this association of Woodwalton with Ramsey, it is conceivable that the house's claim to the land combined with its recently acquired possession of its tenancy, led Walter de Bolbec to quitclaim the land to Ramsey, surrendering his position as tenant-in-chief over Woodwalton. Whether or not a pre-Conquest connection led to this transfer of tenancy-in-chief, the donation was a substantial gift to the house.

Of all the Fenland houses, Thorney proved most adept at accumulating donations in the years leading up to Stephen's reign. This is perhaps due to the leadership of Abbot Robert de Prunelai (1114-1151). One difficulty in assessing the significance of these gifts is establishing exactly when each was made. As is common with medieval charters, the documents comprising the Red Book of Thorney are not clearly dated. While references to

²⁴³ "Moriatur, vel vitam suam mutet." This phrase would seem to have been merely copied into the charter as a standard form when granting a fee for service. As a monk, Walter would be unlikely to further change his life. *CMR* i 154.

²⁴⁴ "Solum et quietum de me et de omnibus heredibus meis, ita ut teneant praedictum manerium in capite de rege." *CMR* i, 156.

²⁴⁵ *CMR* i, 156-157.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 157-158.

²⁴⁷ The land of Walton did not, however, remain unimpaired in Ramsey's possession. This continuation of the story will play a part further in the thesis. *CMR* iii, 220.

²⁴⁸ Huntingdonshire, 205v., Phillimore, 14.1.

²⁴⁹ *CAR*, 145-146; Hertfordshire, 138r., Phillimore, 22.2.

witness can provide general dating, few absolute dates are available. Another concern is the size of the gifts and purchases. Although Thorney benefitted from many acquisitions, they were small. Noting these gains one after another helps to reinforce the image of how a relatively impecunious house might increase its endowment by diligently obtaining and retaining a virgate or a handful of acres.

One gift quite possibly dating earlier in Robert's abbacy is that of Siward son of Thurkill of Arden.²⁵⁰ Siward was the son and "principal heir" of that wealthy Anglo-Saxon Domesday tenant-in-chief.²⁵¹ Siward's initial grant to Thorney was made whilst Gunter was abbot.²⁵² However, after Robert became abbot, he confirmed that gift and added to it "the mill of Ryton-on-Dunsmore that every year renders twelve shillings and the service of Eadric of Flecknoe my man with his land that he holds from me."²⁵³ Siward's connection to Thorney may have predated even his first gift. One of the witnesses, Peter, was not only Siward's brother but also a monk of Thorney. Such a gift shows Thorney attracting donations from individuals of national significance and not merely local landowners.

Thorney's records also record a gift accompanying a new monk of apparently local provenance. When a certain Henry became a monk, his father, Robert of Huntingdon, "granted two houses and the lands upon which the same houses were placed."²⁵⁴ This transaction was publically conducted at the portmanmoot and in the presence of Robert of Yaxley who, in addition to having many connections to the abbey, was justiciar of Huntingdon. Although this grant might be considered a counter-gift in exchange for the abbey's provision of Henry for the rest of his life, its permanent enhancement of the abbey's endowment perhaps helped to counterbalance the cost of the entrance of a new brother.

Late in Abbot Robert's records is one gift with no strings attached. "Fulk [grand]son of William of Lisours and Roger of Stibbington ... offered upon the altar Roger's tithes which [he] had earlier given to that church."²⁵⁵ The record notes that Roger had already given (*dederat*) the tithe, but with Fulk he offered (*optulerunt*) the tithe on the altar. Although little is known about Roger, who may have held only a small parcel of land, Fulk had more connections. According to the Victoria County History, William of Lisours was Fulk's

²⁵⁰ *RB Thorney* ii, 416r.

²⁵¹ *Thorney LV*, 224-225.

²⁵² *RB Thorney* ii, 238r.

²⁵³ *Molendinum Rugentuniae quod omni anno reddit xii s. & servicium Eadrici de Fleockenho mei hominis cum terra sua quam a me habebat. RB Thorney* ii, 416r.

²⁵⁴ *Donavit duas domus & terras super quas eadem domus positae erant. RB Thorney* ii, 419r.

²⁵⁵ *Fulco filius Guillelmi de Lisures & Rogerus de Stibbinton venerunt Thorneyam & optulerunt super altare decimam eiusdem Rogeri quam idem Rogerus ante eidem ecclesiae dederat. RB Thorney* ii, 420r.

maternal grandfather, whilst his father was Vitalis son of Richard Engaine, a Domesday tenant of Sibson-cum-Stibbington in Northamptonshire.²⁵⁶ However, Fulk's career was not merely local: Henry II had him continue as forester in Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, and Buckinghamshire, as William had been under Henry I.²⁵⁷ Fulk also appeared as a witness in a charter of Alice of Clermont, widow of Gilbert fitz Richard of Clare, most likely in the 1120s.²⁵⁸ These gifts of Siward and Robert of Stibbington are individually small compared to Ramsey's Woodwalton, but for a much smaller house like Thorney, they would have been substantially beneficial in increasing the abbey's holdings.

In addition to gifts given freely or at least without recording a grant of confraternity, Thorney also gained land in explicit exchanges for confraternity. Despite this payment of earthly goods for spiritual service, I would argue that confraternity gifts should be considered as pure gifts unless accompanied by a financial counter gift. Donors may have considered the benefits of confraternity to be no less real than land or specie, but the temporal cost of confraternity was negligible to an abbey whilst land and specie offered immediate benefit. Thus Thorney's willingness to exchange their spiritual fellowship for land offers little difference from the house receiving a gift in free alms.

Thorney was the beneficiary of several small gifts that gained the donor confraternity. In a charter recorded under Abbot Robert, one Ralph son of Segbold of Lowick, Northamptonshire, "desiring to make himself share in our fraternity, gave to the church a tiny bit of land which was in the field of his estate and which had been mixed with our lands."²⁵⁹ The initial donation took place in the chapter with the abbot and monks present. This was followed by a ceremony at the church's altar in which Ralph's older brother, Wido, confirmed the grant. Although the small gift was complicated by a later change, the abbey benefitted from Ralph's gift. In a slightly more complicated confraternity record, Thorney received tithes in Chesterton, Huntingdonshire, from one Wido son of Goscelin.²⁶⁰ This record uses "frater" as a prenominal to define Wido, suggesting either that he was a monk or has already been accepted into the church's confraternity. The second option is perhaps preferable because the charter goes on to describe several people as "my men," an unlikely usage for a monk. Wido made the grant as the "chief heir," presumably of the tithes, and

²⁵⁶ VCH *Huntingdonshire*, iii, 219.

²⁵⁷ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 1598.

²⁵⁸ *RB Thorney* ii, 229r

²⁵⁹ Radulfus filius Segbold de Lufwic nostrae fraternitatis se participem fieri expetens huic Ecclesiae quam terrulam in eiusdem ruris arvo nostris terris intermixtam... donavit. *RB Thorney* ii, 416v. Translation assisted by Maria Merino Jaso.

²⁶⁰ *RB Thorney* ii, 419r.

describes the tithes as “mine.” Wido’s gift was for the sake of “fraternity of the place and for the souls of [his] father and mother and of all [his] relatives.”²⁶¹ Throughout the charter Wido seemed to be concerned to prove his rights to the tithes and their disposition. It reads in part that Wido submitted three men to the abbot “in pledge that I am principal heir and can freely grant the tithes.”²⁶² It seems that Wido’s word was good: the abbey held tithes in Chesterton until the Dissolution.²⁶³

Of course gifts given for confraternity did not guarantee that the donation would be unchallenged. Tovi of Lowick, Northamptonshire, and his wife Agnes and son Ralph gave half a virgate and ten acres of land in Lowick, as well as a hide in *Rande* to gain confraternity.²⁶⁴ This brief declaration is followed by a confirmation by Ralph son of Nigel and his wife Amice, Tovi’s daughter. However, Tovi’s gift required further confirmation from the land’s tenant-in-chief, Alice de Clermont, when, presumably following Tovi’s death, his wife Agnes claimed that the land was granted as her dowry.²⁶⁵ Despite the threat to Thorney’s possession, this case shows that the abbey was able to increase its holdings in the years before Stephen’s reign.

Lands and Money

In contrast to free gifts, the houses also increased their lands by expending money. In some cases these expenses were clearly denoted as purchases. In other cases, charters record a transaction as a gift but a disproportionately valuable counter-gift suggests that the donation to the abbey should be considered a purchase. In addition, the Fenland houses were on occasion forced, or chose, to offer financial settlements to tenants who would quitclaim lands claimed by the house. In this section, reacquisitions, counter-gifts, and purchases, in that order, will be considered house by house.

Ely’s record is the simplest because it lacks all of the above cases for the early years of the twelfth century. Although it is not impossible that the house had some cases of acquisition by purchase, neither the *Liber Eliensis* nor the bishop’s collected acta mention any new additions or any payments for reacquisitions. In fact, the only work of reacquisition

²⁶¹ Pro fraternitate loci & pro animabus patris & matris meae & omni parentum meorum. *RB Thorney* ii, 419r.

²⁶² In plegium quod ego sum principalis heres & quod istam decimam bene dare possum. *RB Thorney* ii, 419r.

²⁶³ VCH *Huntingdonshire*, iii, 144.

²⁶⁴ *RB Thorney* ii, 419r-v.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 229r. The involvement of Alice is likely to place the whole of the transaction before 1130. *Thorney LV*, 250.

was that undertaken by Nigel at the Wandlebury Plea soon after he received the bishopric.²⁶⁶ There seems to be no suggestion that the house directly paid for any lands.

Peterborough, although it had no record of a counter-gifts, did pay for quitclaims in two examples. One of Abbot Martin's first charters, that of Pampelina wife of Osbern, shows Martin restoring the abbey's right over some lands.²⁶⁷ The case, recorded in 1133, concerned Martin enforcing the abbey's claim to lands in Peterborough, Werrington, and Glinton that Pampelina "unlawfully held."²⁶⁸ Although there seems to be no question that the abbey had the right to the lands, Abbot Martin was generous. After Pampelina had quitclaimed the lands of herself and her heirs, he gave her the Werrington land for an annual rent of sixpence. In addition, Martin pardoned her a debt of ten shillings. Both decisions are provided with reasons. The return of land was due to both the "requests of his barons" and Pampelina's piety and poverty. The remission of debt was credited to her status as "*neptis* of [Martin's] predecessor John."²⁶⁹ Although this case is singular amongst Martin's records for its female protagonist and her named relationship to the house through an abbot, it shows Martin's willingness to accept an immediate loss for a long-term gain. It is possible that he could have turned out Pampelina (and perhaps her heirs) with nothing, but instead, he regained the abbey's lands and kept his chief tenants happy.

In another case from Martin's court, the abbot reclaimed more land. The tenant, one Gilbert son of Geoffrey of Warmington, Northamptonshire, "in [1133] ... came and there in the presence of the court returned to God and to St Peter and to Abbot Martin all his land that he held in Glinton and declared it to be free and clear of him and his progeny."²⁷⁰ Martin secured this quitclaim from Gilbert by granting him ten shillings and eightpence in cash as well as pardoning three shillings owed.²⁷¹ The case discusses neither the court intervening nor how Gilbert had gained tenancy of the land. However, both Warmington and Glinton were manors held by the abbey. Furthermore, in Domesday, both manors were partially held directly from the abbey and partially by *milites*. It is conceivable that Gilbert had continued a tenancy from his father and held other lands from the abbey. For his own part, Gilbert

²⁶⁶ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 48; p. 287, n. 4. The Wandlebury Plea will be discussed below on page 66.

²⁶⁷ Although these may not all be most accurately regarded as charters, I shall refer to them as charters for the sake of fluency.

²⁶⁸ Edmund King records the case's date as 1135 (*Peterborough*, 30) but the case itself opens with the words "in eodem anno." This phrase seems to point to the case dated to 1133 which is recorded immediately prior to Pampelina's in both *Pythley* and *Swaffham*.

²⁶⁹ John of Sees was Abbot of Peterborough from 1114-1125.

²⁷⁰ "Eodem siquidem anno ... venit & ibi in presentia curie rededit deo & sancto petro & abbati martini totam terram suam quam tenebat in Glinton & solutam & quietam de se & de progenie sua clamavit." *Swaffham*, 114r.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 114r.

foreswore his children's right to the land that he abjured. Martin's agreement with Gilbert shows the abbot fulfilling his duty as prelate to safeguard the lands and goods of his house.²⁷² In addition, the record explains that Martin and Gilbert had worked out the agreement previously in the abbot's chamber in the presence of monks and laymen. Whilst the presence of these individuals does not necessitate their taking part in the formulation of the agreement, it seems plausible that since Martin was a relative newcomer to the abbey, he might take advice from members of the abbey and local laymen who knew that case better than he did. In any case, Martin's reclaiming lands early in his prelacy, although beneficial to the abbey, did not increase the abbey's landholdings. This case, and also the case of Pampelina, can be considered along with purchases because the abbot spent money in order to solidify the abbey's pre-existing right to certain lands.

Abbot Martin also expanded his house's lands through purchase. In a transaction that Edmund King dates to "around 1135" Martin "bought seven acres of land from Burmund the man of Ascelin de Tot."²⁷³ The land was in Werrington, Northamptonshire, where the abbey held lands both in demesne and with subtenants in Domesday. The brief record may suggest a possible reason for the sale when it notes that Burmund had no other heir than his daughter who accompanied him to the abbot's court at Castor. Perhaps the lack of male heirs played a role in Burmund's decision to divest himself of the acres. In any case, such a small purchase seems unlikely to substantially affect the monastery, but it would allow the house to increase its agricultural holdings.

The Peterborough chronicler also indicates another purchase, but provides scant details. At some point before 1144, Goffrid, the sacristan, purchased land from Robert and Hereward, sons of the marshal.²⁷⁴ But aside from the accompanying list of witnesses, the record includes no other details. It is impossible to prove whether the purchase dates from Martin's abbacy or earlier; however, the witness names align with some of those in other records of Martin's time in office and the charter is located amongst other records from that time. The record likely shows Peterborough's sacristy increasing its lands, a fact that would correspond with Abbot Martin's concern for that obedientiary.²⁷⁵ It also shows the abbey making improvements to its financial situation.

²⁷² John Hudson, "Bishops, Abbots, and the Alienation of Church Lands," in *Land, Law, and Lordship* (Oxford, 1994), 230-251.

²⁷³ King, *Peterborough*, 29 fn. 1; "emit septem acras terre de Burmundo homine Azelini de Tot." *Swaffham* 114r.

²⁷⁴ *Swaffham* 115v. One witness, Alward de Burch, seems to have died by 1144 when his sons dispose of his lands. *Swaffham* 114v-115r.

²⁷⁵ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 122.

Abbot Robert de Prunelai of Thorney also spent money to increase his abbey's lands. Rorges of Orton Longueville, Huntingdonshire, with his wife Genovesa gave eight acres of meadow and two fourths in Fen Stanton, Huntingdonshire, for their souls and for fraternity.²⁷⁶ Abbot Robert's response suggests that the ostensible gift might well have been a sale. He paid thirty shillings to Rorges, "part in his hand [and] part in the hand of his son." Although the charter does not otherwise mention any son or heir, this reference to the unnamed son participating in the gift and countergift shows the abbey being careful to bind the donor's heir to the transaction, as does the listing of three witnesses. While this transfer of land may have been viewed simply as a donation with a countergift, thirty shillings seems like more than a nominal gift for such a small piece of land. Thirty shillings is also the purchase price for eight acres of meadow that Abbot Robert purchased elsewhere.²⁷⁷ Most likely Abbot Robert was purchasing land and the recipients also received the spiritual benefits that might accompany doing business with an abbey. In another case Abbot Robert gave both husband and wife 10 s. each along with confraternity in exchange for land in Folkesworth, Huntingdonshire.²⁷⁸ Once again Thorney was adding land to its relatively small estates, but it was a small addition. Although this sort of transaction could benefit the abbey if repeated many times, a house would need an abbot paying close attention to temporal business to ensure that his house would benefit from such opportunities.

Another grant in exchange for confraternity was made by one Odo Revel.²⁷⁹ Based on the witness list, this transaction likely took place before 1130.²⁸⁰ In this case, the countergift seems to be a payment to an individual with connections to the abbey who was in financial distress.²⁸¹ Abbot Robert granted Odo both money and a palfrey that had been previously

²⁷⁶ *RB Thorney* ii, 418r. Although Rorges can only be definitely dated to between 1102-1127, a Henry likely to be the son of Rorges occurs in a Ramsey cartulary entry dated to 1161-1177, and that dating makes it plausible that Rorges's acquisition of confraternity could have taken place whilst Henry's reign was drawing down.

Thorney LV, 210

²⁷⁷ *RB Thorney* ii, 420r.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 419v. Although the dating of these transactions cannot be firmly marked, Gilbert is listed as a witness in the longer witness list of Abbot Robert's concord in 1127 with Robert of Yaxley, and Hugh Olifard, likely dead by 1130 witnessed this transaction. *RB Thorney* i, 145r-v.

²⁷⁹ Odo Revel was another witness of the 1127 concord and he also appeared in other Thorney records. *RB Thorney* i-ii, 145r-v and 419v; Kevin Shirley, *The Secular Jurisdiction of the Monasteries in Anglo-Norman and Angevin England* (Woodbridge, 2004), 32; Cecily Clark, *Words, Names and History Selected Writings of Cecily Clark*, ed. Peter Jackson (Cambridge, 1995), 314; Cownie, *Religious Patronage*, 122; witness to Earl David's settlement between William Peverel and Thorney in *The Charters of King David I The Written Acts of David I King of Scots, 1124-53 and of his son Henry Earl of Northumberland, 1138-52*, ed. G. W. S. Barrow (Woodbridge, 1999), 54; also *RB Thorney* i-ii, 77r-v and 415r.

²⁸⁰ Hugh Olifard's son William had replaced him by 1129/30. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, *Domesday Descendants: A Prosopography of Persons Occurring in English Documents 1066-1166 Vol. II. Pipe Rolls to Cartae Baronum* (Woodbridge, 2002), 1053.

²⁸¹ Cecily Clark comments on this case in *Words, Names, and History*, 314.

donated to the church by one Hugh of Waterville. Considering that the charter begins with the words “Odo Revel, having need, requested of Lord Abbot Robert...” it seems clear that Odo’s gift was not simply that of a man full of love for the monks of Thorney and a desire to enjoy their prayers, nor was the abbot’s countergift merely to deny future claims against the gift. Instead, this record shows the liquidation of assets by Odo to an institution that had the wherewithal to provide for his immediate need.

In one case likely to date no later than 1127, Abbot Robert of Thorney granted a large countergift for the restoration of the estate unlawfully appropriated rather than to balance a supposed gift.²⁸² The Red Book records that Archdeacon Almod quitclaimed the estate of Sawbridge, Warwickshire, and Abbot Robert gave him five pounds of silver “on the condition that he make no further claim upon the land.”²⁸³ This transaction had two laymen present, Robert of Yaxley and William of Chesterton, as well as three parish priests as witnesses. The transaction is further complicated by the mystery of this archdeacon’s identity. Keats-Rohan suggests that he was the same Almod who was a tenant of William of St Calais, Bishop of Durham.²⁸⁴ In any case, Henry I ordered him to return Sawbridge to Thorney.²⁸⁵ Despite this royal command, Almod was still, by some means, able to enjoy a considerable payoff from Thorney. This transaction should be considered as an example of both Abbot Robert practicing his responsibility to preserve his house’s lawful possessions, and also the use of a countergift to enhance the security of tenure.

A final set of Thorney charters to consider involves Robert of Yaxley, nephew of the previous abbot, Gunter.²⁸⁶ He served as steward to his uncle and was later justiciar of Huntingdon during at least part of Robert’s abbacy.²⁸⁷ He regularly appeared in Thorney’s charters as a witness. This connection persisted despite what Lady Stenton describes as “bitter feelings” on Robert of Yaxley’s part after Abbot Robert forced him out of a number of

²⁸² *RB Thorney* ii, 419r. Henry I’s writ concerning Sawbridge states that Ralph Basset will restore the manor if Almod does not obey. Basset likely died c. 1127.

²⁸³ “Ea conditione ut nulla ulterius super eandem terram clamaret.” Domesday places Sawbridge in Northamptonshire, but it is subsequently located by mapmakers across the border in Warwickshire. Northamptonshire, 222v., Phillimore, 10.3.

²⁸⁴ K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, *Domesday People: A Prosopography of Persons Occurring in English Documents, 1066-1166 Vol. I. Domesday Book* (Woodbridge, 1999) 136-137; *Facsimiles of Early Charters from Northamptonshire Collections*, ed. F. M. Stenton (Lincoln, 1930), 15. Keats-Rohan notes that the editors of *Early Northamptonshire Charters* “suggested that Almod had been appointed caretaker of Thorney Abbey following the death of Abbot Gunter in 1112.” Stenton more precisely suggested that Almod had received Sawbridge from the king during the vacancy.

²⁸⁵ *RRAN* ii, 1033.

²⁸⁶ *RB Thorney* ii, 417r-418r.

²⁸⁷ *Thorney LV*, 268.

holdings.²⁸⁸ According to a notification recorded in Thorney's *Red Book*, Abbot Gunter had given his nephew lands in both Sibson and Yaxley not merely without the consent of the chapter but against its will.²⁸⁹ Under Abbot Robert, the abbey reclaimed the land, but permitted Robert of Yaxley to retain three and a half virgates of the land in Yaxley and paid him two marks of silver. Robert of Yaxley accepted Thorney's payment from the abbots of Thorney and Ramsey as well as a third individual, the steward of Ramsey, Hervey Monachus, in order to ensure that there could be no question of whether or not the payment was made.²⁹⁰ The record is accompanied by quitclaims from Robert of Yaxley, his son William, and William's nephew. At some point the abbey also purchased five acres and a fourth of meadow from Robert of Yaxley with the consent of his wife Emma and his sons William and Gunter.²⁹¹ This set of charters shows examples of Abbot Robert both strengthening a reacquisition through giving money to the losing party in the lawsuit and purchasing a property. The charters also help to show what the years leading into Stephen's reign were like for monastic houses. An active abbot was able to improve his house's situation by righting a wrong and by purchasing land. Although the amount purchased was not substantial, Thorney had improved its situation. Some sixty years after the Conquest a relatively small abbey whose abbot was from Normandy was strengthening its rights over its lands and adding bits of land to its demesne. The disruption of 1066 was long gone.

Conclusion

Overall the Fenland houses experienced a varied period under the first three Norman kings. Despite the first two decades being marked by disruptions, revolt in the Fens, new and foreign abbots, and the imposition of knight service, by the end of Henry I's reign things were settling down, and although there was no sign of substantial new endowments, the houses were at least largely stable in their holdings. Furthermore, with the exception of Peterborough, the houses increasingly enjoyed the benefit of stability that often accompanied long-serving prelates. However, there were mitigating factors in Peterborough's case. The newly appointed abbot was from a neighboring priory that belonged to Bec so he was both known locally and a man with political connections. Even Peterborough had reason to be

²⁸⁸ Doris M. Stenton, *English Justice Between the Norman Conquest and the Great Charter 1066—1215*. (Philadelphia, 1964). 24-25.

²⁸⁹ *RB Thorney* ii, 416r.

²⁹⁰ Edmund King, "Dispute Settlement in Anglo-Norman England" *Anglo-Norman Studies* XIV (Woodbridge, 1992), 115-130, 118. In an undated charter Hervey Monachus also gained confraternity at Thorney in exchange for a fishery. *RB Thorney* i, 194v.

²⁹¹ *RB Thorney* ii, 418r.

hopeful for the future. Based on the situation of the Fenland houses in 1135, the praise lavished on Henry I by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E seems warranted. The country was at peace, the Church was flourishing, and some small growth of landed endowment was still being experienced.

Chapter Two: Wrongs During Stephen's Reign

Introduction

For the Fenland houses, although the years leading up to Stephen's reign were not without problems, the houses increasingly experienced stability and peace under long-serving prelates and firm royal rule. It is therefore all the more understandable when the Peterborough chronicler laments the horrors he associated with Stephen's reign: the ravaging of his land by criminals who ignored the rebuke of the church and were not stopped by the king. Although the kingdom's inhabitants from great to small were reported to experience this violence, that done to religious houses was particularly commented on, perhaps because so much evidence of the time came from the pens of churchmen. The wrongdoers ranged from the greatest in the land to men of knightly class. Considering the men who committed wrongs against the Fenland houses and seeking to understand their reasons for such actions can help present a more accurate picture of the time period as a whole. The record of wrongs helps support a more maximalist view of the problems of Stephen's reign. In particular, since the Fens were known as one of the centers of violence and depredation, looking at what happened there, as far as sources permit, sheds light on the records of "Anarchy." This chapter will first consider the most well recorded events and then turn to less documented cases of wrongdoing from those of high status down to largely unknown knights.

Geoffrey de Mandeville

At least from the work of J. H. Round on, the rebellion of the first earl of Essex in 1143-1144 has been viewed as a key episode of Stephen's reign.²⁹² The background to Geoffrey's career and the charters he received has enjoyed much study and needs only the briefest of introductions.²⁹³ Geoffrey came from an illustrious Conquest family, and his grandfather was well rewarded for his service to William I. Geoffrey's father did rather less well and under Henry I lost his position, including control of the Tower of London. As a result, Geoffrey

²⁹² Round reasonably proposed that the vivid words of the *ASC-E* regarding the horrors of Stephen's reign were prompted by Geoffrey's rebellion.

²⁹³ Round, *Geoffrey*; C. Warren Hollister, "The Misfortunes of the Mandevilles" in *History*, 58 (1973), 18-28.; J. O. Prestwich and R. H. C. Davis, "The Treason of Geoffrey de Mandeville" in *The English Historical Review*, 103 (April 1988) 283-317. Prestwich, "Geoffrey de Mandeville: A Further Comment" in *English Historical Review*, 103 (Oct. 1988), 960-966; Davis, "Geoffrey de Mandeville: A Final Comment" in *English Historical Review*, 103 (Oct. 1998), 967-968; Prestwich and Davis, "Last Words on Geoffrey de Mandeville" in *English Historical Review*, 105 (Jul. 1990), 670-672. King offers support for Davis's position. "A Week in Politics" in *King Stephen's Reign*, eds., Dalton and White (Woodbridge, 2008), 58-79, 64-70. Judith Green offers a sympathetic take on the earl. "The Charters of Geoffrey de Mandeville" in *Rulership and Rebellion in the Anglo-Norman World*, eds., Paul Dalton and David Luscombe (Farnham, 2015), 91-110.

himself seems to have been steadily working to restore his family lands, name, and position, and showed every sign of completing his goal during the first few years of Stephen's reign. However, after the Battle of Lincoln, Geoffrey had to navigate through uncertain waters. Although he managed to receive charters from both Stephen and the Empress, their nature and possible dating suggest a degree of tergiversation of his part.²⁹⁴ After the eventful summer of 1141, Geoffrey's recorded actions suggest that he had decided to support the king's government, and that the earl's career as a royal servant was climbing in 1143.²⁹⁵

Nevertheless, that September, the king arrested Geoffrey at the royal court at St Albans and refused to free him until the earl had surrendered the three major castles he held, the Tower of London, Walden, and Pleshey. Some contemporaries deemed Stephen's actions necessary. Henry of Huntingdon claimed that had Stephen not unjustly arrested the earl "he would have been deprived of his kingdom."²⁹⁶ The *Gesta* is less certain of Geoffrey's malevolence but notes that many were saying that the earl was prepared to give Matilda the kingdom.²⁹⁷ This account seeks to exonerate the king's behavior in the arrest. It relates that Stephen's closest familiars pressed the king to arrest Geoffrey because they deemed his power dangerous to the royal majesty and the kingdom, but the king realized how shameful such an action would be and resisted their urging. Eventually these friends engaged Geoffrey in an argument in Stephen's presence and accused Geoffrey of machinating against the king. At that point the earl's lighthearted response to a heavy accusation led Stephen to arrest Geoffrey. Even if the arrest were politically justified, the king's action against Geoffrey seemed to take the earl by surprise.

Stephen's actions both brought the king's reputation under question and presented a probable justification for Geoffrey's following course of action. Regardless of whether or not Geoffrey was a threat to Stephen's position, the arrest itself was generally considered to be undesirable to the king's honor even by two anti-Geoffrey sources. Henry of Huntingdon clearly allowed that Geoffrey was a danger to the kingdom, as did the author of the *Gesta* with only minimal hesitation. Even so, Henry of Huntingdon states that the arrest was "more according to recompense of the wickedness of the earl than according to the law of the

²⁹⁴ It is perhaps noteworthy that the *Liber Eliensis* associates Geoffrey with those magnates who supported Queen Matilda and tirelessly worked to restore Stephen to the throne. *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 74, pp. 322-323.

²⁹⁵ *Gesta Stephani*, ed. and trans., K. R. Potter, notes, R. H. C. Davis (Oxford, 1976), 160-163.

²⁹⁶ "Nisi enim hoc egisset, perfidia consulis illius regno priuatus fuisset." Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford, 1996), 742-743.

²⁹⁷ *GS*, 160-163.

peoples; more according to necessity than based on moral integrity.”²⁹⁸ Though less precisely stated, the lengthy apology that the *Gesta Stephani* presents for Stephen’s actions against Geoffrey suggests that the author, one of the king’s most partisan supporters, also believed the arrest to be unsavory if not unjust. Another source, the historian of Walden, Geoffrey’s own monastery, was less convinced of Geoffrey’s potential for treason but sure that Stephen’s action was wrong. Walden’s historian claims that the accusations were jealous calumny and that the earl was “deceitfully seized”²⁹⁹ Although the defense of the earl by a monk from his own foundation must be taken with a grain of salt, the author’s condemnation of the arrest itself as unjust certainly accords with other accounts. For example the story of Geoffrey’s arrest was retold years later by two monks of St Albans. While Roger of Wendover simply repeated Henry of Huntingdon’s account of the arrest, Matthew Paris gave another version. This account, written about a century after the arrest, is uncorroborated by other extant sources but gives what was perhaps a local version of the events.³⁰⁰ Paris related a violent struggle that resulted in William d’Aubigny, the Earl of Arundel, being knocked from his horse and almost drowned.³⁰¹ Paris continues the story and considers that Stephen’s action of arresting Geoffrey at the church was wrong because “the king did this against the oath that he had made at St Albans and against the recently announced statutes of the council to which he agreed.”³⁰² Whether this anecdote is true or not, it seems sure that whatever Geoffrey might have been planning, the king’s solution to the problem was broadly condemned at the time and later.

There is no certain explanation for Stephen’s risky action even amongst modern historians. R. H. C. Davis accepted the rationale presented by William of Newburgh: Stephen was angry that Geoffrey had kept custody of the king’s daughter-in-law, Constance of France, in 1141.³⁰³ From this point on, Davis argued, Stephen played a long game with Geoffrey until the kingdom was thoroughly enough under royal control that the earl could be

²⁹⁸ Magis secundum retributionem nequitie consulis quam secundum ius gentium, magis ex necessitate quam ex honestate. Henry of Huntingdon, ed. Greenway, 742.

²⁹⁹ “Fraudulenter comprehensus,” *The Book of the Foundation of Walden Monastery*, eds. and trans. Diana Greenway and Leslie Watkiss (Oxford, 1999), 14-15.

³⁰⁰ Edmund King ascribes Paris’s version to “one of the knightly families holding at St Albans.” *King Stephen*, 195 fn.

³⁰¹ Matthew Paris, *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Historia Anglorum, sive, ut vulgo dicitur Historia Minor*, ed. Frederic Madden, vol. i (London, 1866), 270-271. Although “fere submersus” could mean almost submerged, in context of Arundel’s being knocked “in medio aquae” “drowned” seems a preferable translation. Paris’s account suffers in credibility because he wrote it long after the events related and because he calls Geoffrey “William de Mandeville.” Round defends using Paris’s account. *Geoffrey*, 205 fn., 1.

³⁰² Et hoc fecit contra jusjurandum, quod fecerat apud Sanctum Albanum, et contra statuta concilii nuper, eo consentiente, celebrati. Matthew Paris, ed. Madden, i, 271.

³⁰³ Davis, *Stephen* 3rd ed. 77ff; William of Newburgh, *Chronicle of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II., and Richard I.* Vol. I. ed. Richard Howlett (London, 1884), 44-45.

cut down to size. Davis believed that Stephen was clever in his action, but foolish in his strategy: Geoffrey was deprived of his castles, but Stephen lost some luster as a just king, and the earl was not sufficiently neutered to keep the peace. David Crouch has less sympathy for Stephen and argues that the arrest of Geoffrey was “a very serious political error.”³⁰⁴ He scoffs at William of Newburgh’s story and portrays the arrest as Stephen once more listening to poor advice from jealous counselors.³⁰⁵ Geoffrey’s rebellion, according to Crouch’s well-presented argument, was one of survival and anger, not some campaign on behalf of Matilda.³⁰⁶ Edmund King also takes William of Newburgh’s story with a grain of salt and views claims that the earl was siding with Matilda as “the crux of the matter and ... one that is very difficult to test.”³⁰⁷ King notes that several of Stephen’s associates were likely to be amongst those who accused Geoffrey and benefitted from his arrest.³⁰⁸ This minor benefit aside, the arrest and release produced new problems for Stephen and his kingdom.

Following his release, Geoffrey responded by launching a rebellion against the king. There is no firm evidence that his determination was to throw his support to Matilda. In fact, one of the most contemporary accounts, the *Waltham Chronicle* associates Geoffrey’s violence solely with his local rivalry against William d’Aubigny who it claims respected no one and nothing but Stephen.³⁰⁹ Other accounts make it clear that Geoffrey was responding to what he considered to be unjust treatment by the king. Only Ramsey’s account of Abbot Walter claims that Geoffrey was “taking the part of the Empress.”³¹⁰ This claim is unsupported and may reflect a local understanding of the troubles. The *Gesta* reports that news of Geoffrey’s rebellion against Stephen encouraged the king’s enemies at large, and that the earl’s first concern seems to have been striking back at the king.³¹¹ After building a force of his men and mercenaries Geoffrey attacked the possessions of Stephen’s adherents, then turned to Cambridge, a city “subject to royal authority,” and finally invaded and occupied Ramsey Abbey.³¹² Although this description of the earl’s campaign does not detail all of the earl’s attacks, in particular failing to name Ely amongst his victims, it does show how Geoffrey desired to strike back against the king. Henry of Huntingdon, progressing year

³⁰⁴ Crouch, *Stephen*, 208.

³⁰⁵ This contention is buttressed by *The Life of Christina of Markyate a twelfth century recluse*, ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot, (Oxford, 1987), 168-171.

³⁰⁶ Crouch, *Stephen*, 210-212.

³⁰⁷ King, *Stephen*, 195.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 195-196.

³⁰⁹ *The Waltham Chronicle An account of the discovery of our holy cross at Montacute and its conveyance to Waltham*, ed. and trans. Leslie Watkiss and Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford, 1994), 76-79.

³¹⁰ “Partem fovens Imperatricis.” *CAR*, 329

³¹¹ *GS*, 162-163.

³¹² “Regio iuri subditam.” *GS*, 164-165.

by year through Stephen's reign, said that in 1144 Geoffrey "vexed the king most exceedingly."³¹³ The picture is that of a powerful baron who desired to force his opponent into righting a keenly felt wrong. This general image is supported in the Walden history whose author states that it was "with measureless animosity" that Geoffrey surrendered his castles to Stephen and then "immediately" began his campaign to gather soldiers against Stephen's estates.³¹⁴ While it seems clear that the earl's actions were focused on the king, his means of opposing Stephen included gathering income from where he could find it. The Walden account accuses Geoffrey of sending men to spy out those who had money whom he then kidnapped and tortured until the complete ransom he demanded was paid.³¹⁵ Although these steps may be deplored, there is no proof that Geoffrey's rebellion should be taken as the actions of an Angevin partisan. Instead his actions seem to be those of an enemy of Stephen's who tried both to strike at places associated with the king and who desperately sought the financial means of continuing his fight.

Geoffrey's strategy involved whatever steps he deemed necessary to win, including violating churches and church property. The Walden author, who might be expected to defend his house's founder, notes that Geoffrey "showed no reverence by sparing holy places or even churches themselves."³¹⁶ Such a charge is not unique against participants in the fighting during Stephen's reign. Although Thomas Callahan argues that earlier scholars overstated how much religious houses suffered during Stephen's reign, even he lists houses up and down the country that suffered some sort of wrongs.³¹⁷ It would in fact have been noteworthy had Geoffrey studiously refrained from allowing action against churches.

One source, the complimentary Waltham Chronicle, claims that Geoffrey was careful of at least some ecclesiastical buildings. The author stated that when Geoffrey's men burned down much of the town of Waltham as he fought against William d'Aubigny, Earl of Arundel, Geoffrey took diligent care that the church itself not be burned.³¹⁸ The author also claimed that the earl wished that no church property be damaged, but accepted that in order to fulfill his desire "to avenge the injustice inflicted upon him" some damage would be done.³¹⁹ This narrative, if taken at face value, expands our understanding of the earl's rebellion in at least two ways. First, it shows that Geoffrey's arrest resulted not only in the loss of his

³¹³ "Regem ualdissime uexauit." Henry of Huntingdon, ed. Greenway, 744.

³¹⁴ "Cum immenso animi rancore" and "statim." *Walden*, 14-15.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-17.

³¹⁶ "Locis sacris uel etiam ipsis de ecclesiis nullam deferendo exhibuit reuerentiam." *Ibid.*, 16.

³¹⁷ Callahan, "Impact," 218-232.

³¹⁸ *Waltham*, 80-81.

³¹⁹ "Iniuriam sibi illatam uindicare." *Ibid.*, 80-81.

castles, but also of his other holdings. Whilst he might have experienced greater shame in losing his position and the castles that were his patrimony and that had been so arduously reclaimed, the loss of lands to a familiar of the king's such as the earl of Arundel would not only shame the earl but also devastate his financial well-being. Furthermore as long as Arundel remained loyal to Stephen, Geoffrey would have little hope of regaining his lands simply through petitioning the king. Secondly, the story suggests that violating ecclesiastical property was viewed as an undesirable but acceptable option in order to fulfill an important goal. Geoffrey needed to retaliate against Arundel who had burned his houses and therefore he had the town of Waltham set alight. The author, despite being amongst the canons whose homes were burned, was not particularly upset about the burning, only that Geoffrey refused to pay for the righting of the wrong. It seems that many wrongs against ecclesiastical lands or buildings were rectifiable should the wrongdoer make payment.³²⁰ Geoffrey's unwillingness to pay whilst in the midst of rebellion might be attributed to scarcity of funds rather than malevolence towards the Church in general or towards the canons of Waltham in particular. He simply could not afford to right the wrong whilst in rebellion against Stephen.

Geoffrey's rebellion continued up into the Fens where he already had a lengthy history with Ely. When Bishop Nigel had first rebelled against Stephen in late 1139, following Roger of Salisbury's death, Stephen granted oversight of Ely to Geoffrey, possibly after it was held by his father-in-law, Aubrey de Vere.³²¹ In 1142, following the king's exchange for Robert of Gloucester, Stephen once again sent Geoffrey, this time accompanied by Earl Gilbert (either Gilbert fitz Gilbert Earl of Pembroke or his nephew Gilbert fitz Richard Earl of Hertford) to regain the Isle from supporters of the bishop.³²² On this occasion the Ely historian relates how Geoffrey humiliated the knights defending the Isle by tying their feet below their horses as he led them into Ely itself.³²³ Oddly considering the earl's actions later, the *Liber* records that Geoffrey was angry with the monks of Ely for their presumed

³²⁰ This point is shown in the following history from Waltham. Soon after the Geoffrey anecdotes, the Waltham author relates how one Humphrey of Barington, in the midst of pursuing a course of some unspecified wickedness, had the effrontery to ride his horse into and out of the church. As a fitting punishment he was struck down by a God-sent demon, but he was taken to the church and prayed over for three days and then healed. Humphrey then made suitable amends and gave the church fourteen acres of land. This history further illustrates that wronging a church was not an unforgiveable sin, it merely required expiation, presumably in the form of professed penitence and a gift. Had Geoffrey managed to succeed in his campaign against Stephen, regained his lands, and then made suitable gifts to the churches he had wronged, his memory might have been held differently in England. *Waltham*, 82-83.

³²¹ This is evidenced in *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 71, p. 320 and ch. 76, pp. 323-324. John Hudson, "Nigel (c. 1100-1169)," *ODNB* (2004) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20190>, accessed 19 November 2018], 3.

³²² *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 69, p. 319. Judith Green argues for Pembroke. "Charters of Geoffrey de Mandeville," 93.

³²³ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 69, p. 319.

association with the rebellion against Stephen, and that it was only when Stephen intervened that Geoffrey permitted the monks to have control of their own lands and revenues.³²⁴ Thus Geoffrey was likely to be viewed with hostility at Ely, but that stance was complicated during his rebellion.

Geoffrey's occupation of Ely increased the troubles and confusion of the house during Stephen's reign. Geoffrey's rebellion took place whilst Nigel was absent from Ely and perhaps already in Rome or journeying there to appeal charges of illegally expelling a priest from his living and a multitude of other charges encompassing his opposition to Stephen from 1139 until after Matilda's loss of primacy.³²⁵ Exactly what was happening between Stephen and Nigel is hard to tease out, as while the bishop was clearly not in royal favor, there is no explicit statement that Stephen was working to remove him. Yet, there are several facts that suggest the uncertainty of his position. The case that resulted in Nigel's traveling to Rome is presented by the Ely source not only as having little validity, but as also receiving the full support of Henry of Winchester as legate. The *Liber* accuses the legate of stirring up against Nigel additional testimony from the Priors of Eye and St Frideswide's Oxford to weaken the bishop's position in Rome.³²⁶ Nigel himself also played into their fears that he still opposed the king by travelling west to seek advice and support from Matilda.³²⁷ Unfortunately for Nigel, his journey met with mixed results; although he received the help from Matilda that he requested, it was only after being robbed and barely escaping capture by men of the king at Wareham. Nigel was still clearly an enemy of Stephen's and under threat. After a brief return to Ely to fill his coffers with monastic treasures, Nigel headed to Rome. While his journey was successful in gaining papal support during his travels for the monks at Ely had new problems.

It was apparently during this absence of Nigel's that Geoffrey was arrested, rebelled, and entered Ely. The situation in Ely itself was uncertain. The *Liber Eliensis* makes it clear that Nigel's men must have been holding the Isle because the "men guarding the Isle" were afraid that "the king's men" harbored designs against it.³²⁸ The historian himself makes the

³²⁴ The *Liber Eliensis* places a charter of Stephen's here which seems that it dates back to the first time Geoffrey governed Ely on the king's behalf, in 1140. Despite lacking the appropriate documentary proof, the *Liber's* narrative's claim that Stephen had to intervene on behalf of the monks still stands.

³²⁵ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 77, p. 324; ch. 83, p. 329.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 77, p. 324. Gauselinus/Zolinus, Eye & Robert of Cricklade, St Frideswide; *Heads of Religious Houses*, ed. Knowles, 2nd ed., 102 & 180

³²⁷ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 78, pp. 324-326. Nigel may have made this journey earlier in the year before his case arose increasing suspicion of his loyalty.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 82, p. 328.

claim that the king's men "were devising stratagems against the holy place of Ely."³²⁹ Since the *Liber* tends to hew a pro-Stephen line, such an accusation reflects the deep uncertainty of the inhabitants of the Isle as to whom their friends were. As a result, the knights, if not the monks, welcomed the rebellious earl, despite his ongoing reign of terror in the Fens, apparently as a counter-weight to royal power.³³⁰ Perhaps they feared that with Nigel gone Stephen would once again demand direct control of the Isle. Geoffrey gained control of the fortresses of Ely and Aldreth and continued to use Ely as a safe point in his control of the Fens.³³¹ The *Liber* records that after occupying Ramsey, Geoffrey "retreated peacefully through Ely to Fordham," a royal manor in southeast Cambridgeshire that he held in defiance of the king.³³² This action brought a strong reaction from Stephen who "dreadfully inflamed with wrath, reckoned that Bishop Nigel contrived all these things."³³³ The *Liber Eliensis* does not support this contention, instead noting that Nigel was still on his journey to Rome. This lack of rebuke suggests that Nigel played no part that the author knew of in Geoffrey's rampages. When the bishop had rebelled against Stephen in 1139, the monastic author did not hesitate to take Nigel to task.³³⁴ Consequently, his failure to apportion blame at this point suggests, although it cannot prove, that the bishop should be absolved of complicity in Geoffrey's rebellion. Nevertheless, Stephen, probably considering Nigel's history of hostility to the royal cause and support for Matilda, "immediately ordered that the possessions of the church be seized by his men."³³⁵ Although Geoffrey himself is not recorded as taking hostile action against monks, it was Stephen's order, in conjunction with the devastation caused by Geoffrey's rebellion, which brought hard times to the monks of Ely.

In contrast to his treatment of Ely, Geoffrey took direct and extreme action against the monks of Ramsey. Therefore it is not surprising that many contemporaries refer to the notorious events that occurred there. The *Liber Eliensis* notes that Geoffrey, clearly mad, drove out the monks of Ramsey and occupied the buildings.³³⁶ The *Gesta Stephani* explains in more detail that Geoffrey "not only took spoils of the monks, and even stripped the altars and the relics of the saints, but he also mercilessly expelled the monks from the monastery

³²⁹ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 82, p. 328.

³³⁰ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 82, p. 328. Once again the *Liber* speaks ill of the bishop and suggests that his lengthy absence was due in soeme way to his own choice.

³³¹ William I initially built fortifications in Ely and Aldreth after subduing the Isle in 1071. Nigel re fortified both locations when he rebelled against Stephen after the arrest of the bishops. The limited archaeological evidence from these sites is discussed by Creighton and Wright, *The Anarchy*, 255-259.

³³² *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 82, p. 328.

³³³ "In iram graviter accensus omnia hec reputavit ab episcopo Nigello machinari." *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 82, p. 328.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 62, pp. 314-315.

³³⁵ "Iussit e vestigio possessiones ecclesie a suis undique distrahi." *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 82, p. 328.

³³⁶ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 82, p. 328.

and installed knights, turning [the abbey] into a castle.”³³⁷ Henry of Huntingdon recorded the main events but added few specifics, although he did offer eyewitness corroboration of the account of the *Chronicon* that Ramsey’s walls bled during the occupation.³³⁸ It is not surprising then that Geoffrey’s actions were memorable enough to be used as a dating clause in a charter issued to Thorney Abbey by Adeliz, Countess of Clare.³³⁹ However, the most detailed explanation of the earl’s actions come from the history of Abbot Walter written some years after the events described.³⁴⁰ The author vividly relates that the earl “occupied the monastery, dispersed the monks, seized the treasure and all the ornaments of the church with a sacrilegious hand, and made the monastery into a stable for horses.”³⁴¹ Geoffrey’s occupation of Ramsey was not only a brutal one in the mind of the monks, but also one that resisted every effort to free it. When Walter, the canonically approved abbot, returned from Rome, he tried several strategies to dislodge the earl. However, neither setting fire to the earl’s fortification nor excommunicating the offender could compel Geoffrey to return the abbey to the monks.³⁴² Not only were the abbey precincts lost to the monks, but Geoffrey also commandeered the neighboring lands of the house and assigned them to his followers as payment for their service.³⁴³ Despite his best efforts the abbot was powerless to fulfill his duties, having nothing to support his empty title of abbot.³⁴⁴

Geoffrey’s seizure of Ramsey threatened the existence of the monastery. The monks were utterly bereft of their property, both movable and immovable. Although none of the sources report how the monks survived, a lack of reported deaths suggests that they found temporary homes. Unfortunately for historians, there are few details of exactly what goods and properties were lost because of Geoffrey’s occupation. As the account of the *Gesta Stephani* shows, contemporaries were focused on the sacrilege of seizing an abbey, making its monks homeless, and violating its religious nature by transforming it into a castle, not necessarily in cataloging the list of wrongs. The local history too, although it comments on

³³⁷ “Non solum captis monachorum spoliis, altaribus quoque et sanctorum reliquiis nudatis, ... sed etiam expulsis incompassiue monachis de monasterio, militibusque impositis, castellum sibi adaptavit.” *GS*, 164-165. The text uses ablative plural of *reliquia* which the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* only records as “reliquaries” in the late-twelfth century, but context suggests that Geoffrey stripped the valuable coverings, i.e. “reliquaries” that surrounded the relics themselves. Impious as his assault may have been, desecrating the relics themselves seems likely to be beyond the pale for Geoffrey. [<http://clt.brepolis.net/dmlbs/pages/ArticlePrinter.aspx?dict=BS&id=65393>, accessed 5 December 2018]

³³⁸ *CAR*, 330; Henry of Huntingdon, ed. Greenway, 742-747.

³³⁹ *RB Thorney* ii, 206r-v.

³⁴⁰ *CAR*, 325ff. This work began c. 1170. Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 270.

³⁴¹ *CAR*, 329.

³⁴² *CAR*, 330.

³⁴³ “Stipendiis,” *Ibid.*, 329.

³⁴⁴ “Quo se vergat abbas penitus ignorant, nihil habens nisi nomen abbatis.” *Ibid.*, 331.

the financial devastation associated with Geoffrey's invasion, does not give particulars.³⁴⁵ Some general geographic information shows that a number of Ramsey's valuable estates such as Warboys, St Ives, the Hemingfords, and Over lay in the area between Ramsey, Cambridge, and Ely where Geoffrey's rampages seem to have been the worst. But even this information cannot provide a firm analysis of the abbey's damages. What can be concluded is that the earl's actions were not only financially harmful to Ramsey through wasted livestock, lost revenues, neglected fields, but they were also troubling to the peace and security of England as a whole.

While some results of Geoffrey's actions are apparent, his motive for seizing the abbey of Ramsey and its lands is nowhere explicitly proved. Two main suggestions seem probable. As Hollister discussed, the Mandevilles had already experienced the drastic turn of fortune's wheel from the Conquest generation to Geoffrey's own.³⁴⁶ Stephen's act of depriving the earl of the patrimony that he had worked to regain may have driven Geoffrey to seek an alternative honour in the estates of Ramsey. The church and its lands would provide a base for a campaign to force Stephen to restore the Mandeville castles and prestige. Of course, Geoffrey cannot have imagined that he would be able to deprive the monks of their lands forever. His interaction with Abbot Walter suggests that he was not an inveterate enemy of Ramsey's, but merely a man determined to fight his battle. He seemed to be planning to return the abbey's property to its abbot when able. However, in addition to forging a new honor, Geoffrey may also have been continuing his mission to attack supporters of the king by invading Ramsey. At the time of his invasion, the abbacy was occupied by Daniel who was associated with Stephen. This connection will be explored at length when considering the role of prelates during Stephen's reign.³⁴⁷ Some historians further broaden Geoffrey's motivations from opposing a royalist abbot to supporting an Angevin-leaning one.³⁴⁸ This argument is tempting, but while the loss of family lands and a desire to strike at the king are clear motivations for Geoffrey, more consideration is needed to determine whether there is proof that Abbot Walter was an Angevin supporter and thus a fit object of Geoffrey's support. What can be determined is that the event that contemporaries considered to be the most shocking of Stephen's reign can in part be traced back to the king himself. His strategy of arresting a powerful tenant-in-chief, compelling the surrender of his castles, and releasing him had turned out poorly in the case of the bishops. In Geoffrey de

³⁴⁵ *CAR*, 334.

³⁴⁶ Hollister, "Misfortunes," 18-28.

³⁴⁷ See below page 90ff.

³⁴⁸ Davis, *Stephen*, 3rd ed., 79, n. 15; King, *Stephen*, 198-199.

Mandeville's case it was disastrous. The resulting turmoil devastated Ramsey, threatened Ely's well-being, and amplified the feeling that Stephen was unable to keep the peace.

Other Well Documented Cases

Woodwalton, Huntingdonshire

While Geoffrey's rebellion was clearly the most infamous occasion of monastic troubles, there were smaller cases that were reasonably well documented such as that of Woodwalton, Huntingdonshire. As discussed above, the gift of this land to Ramsey Abbey was recorded in a series of charters from both Walter of Bolbec, the tenant-in-chief, and his tenant, Albreda daughter of Remelin, widow of Eustace of Sellea.³⁴⁹ Although Walter of Bolbec first allowed the abbey to hold the land "for the service of two knights," he later quitclaimed it to Abbot Walter and Ramsey so that they could hold it as tenant-in-chief from the king.³⁵⁰ With Henry I also granting a charter of confirmation, the abbey's possession of the estate might have been viewed as settled.³⁵¹

During Stephen's reign, the land of Woodwalton did not remain unimpaired in Ramsey's possession. The Ramsey Cartulary includes an inquisition of Abbot William's into the holdings of the knights of Ramsey *c.* 1166.³⁵² At the end, after briefly summarizing the history of the donation, the cartulary continues, "but in the time of war the sons of the aforementioned Albreda through violence seized that estate."³⁵³ The abbey did not give up; "afterwards Abbot William, to take back the aforementioned estate of Woodwalton ... made his brother accept as spouse the wife of the aforementioned knight together with the estate."³⁵⁴

While the brief narrative related by Ramsey documents seems to neatly wrap up the story of Woodwalton as one of gifting, seizure by Albreda's sons during the time of war, and then eventual re-appropriation by William, Ramsey had other problems at Woodwalton. The *Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis* notes that Geoffrey de Mandeville's son Ernulf had built a

³⁴⁹ *CMR* i, 153-156.

³⁵⁰ "Solum et quietum de me et de omnibus heredibus meis, ita ut teneant praedictum manerium in capite de rege." *Ibid.*, 156.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 157-158; *RRAN* ii, no. 1766.

³⁵² *CMR* iii, 218-220. Hart and Lyons misdate the inquisition to after William's abbacy. The inquisition cannot date later than 1167 when Stephen de Scalers died. I. J. Sanders, *English Baronies a study of their origin and descent 1086-1327* (Oxford, 1960), 30.

³⁵³ Set, tempore guerrae, filii praedictae Albredae occupaverunt per violentiam eandem villam. *CMR* iii, 220.

³⁵⁴ Postea Willelmus Abbas praenominatam villam de Waltona ... revocare, fecit fratrem suum praedicti militis uxorem conjugem accipere simul cum villa. *Ibid.*, 220.

castle there.³⁵⁵ There is no further information to indicate when this occurred in relation to the invasion of Albreda's sons. In addition, the *Chronicon* records a writ of Stephen's commanding Earl Simon of Huntingdon that he "re-seise the abbot of Ramsey of his manor of Woodwalton and see to it that he holds it ... neither suffer that Ralph of Normanville or any other deforce [the abbot] of it nor do injustice to him nor do injury."³⁵⁶ While this charter could be tentatively dated to 1138 x 1153, it likely dates 1147 x 1153.³⁵⁷ Simon II only briefly held his earldom before 1141, and Nigel of Ely did not witness royal charters after his arrest until 1147 x 1148.³⁵⁸ If the narrow dating range is accepted, it seems likely that at some point after Geoffrey's devastation, Ralph of Normanville laid claim to the land. Stephen then acted to prevent one named claimant from further injuring Ramsey. While this conclusion is somewhat speculative, what can be certainly seen is that at least three parties, Ernulf, Ralph of Normanville, and Albreda's sons, held all or part of Woodwalton illegally at some point during Stephen's reign. Clearly those years challenged the abbey's ability to retain its land. Consequently, by the beginning of Henry II's reign Ramsey was seeking to cement its legal right of possession of the estate. Woodwalton was listed in a general confirmation the king issued, and the abbey received two charters confirming its possession in 1155 x 1158.³⁵⁹ However, the actual resumption by Abbot William through his brother could not have taken place until 1161 x 1179.

The history of Woodwalton shows several problems that Ramsey and other Fenland houses dealt with. One challenge was the ever-present problem of the heirs of donors seeking to reclaim what they might have inherited. While this was not a new difficulty, the violence that accompanied the disagreement over who should hold Woodwalton seems to be uncommon during the Anglo-Norman period except during "the reigns of the Conqueror and Stephen," as Hudson notes.³⁶⁰ Another problem is evidenced by the length of time it took Ramsey to reclaim its land. While the phrase "time of war" is vague enough that it could apply either to the narrow window of Geoffrey de Mandeville's rebellion or the entirety of Stephen's reign, in either case the loss almost certainly occurred before Henry II came to the

³⁵⁵ *CAR*, 332.

³⁵⁶ "Resaisias abbatem Rames[ensem] de manerio suo de Waltone, et facias eum illud ... nec patiaris quod Radulfus de Normanville vel alius aliquis illud ei deforciet neque ei injuriam vel contumeliam faciat." *CAR*, 321. Simon was Stephen's principal agent of government in Huntingdonshire. Keith Stringer, "Senlis, Simon de, earl of Northampton and earl of Huntingdon (d. 1153)" *ODNB* (2004) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/25092>, accessed 19 November 2018], 1; King, Stephen, 278.

³⁵⁷ Cronne and Davis gave the wider dating range. *RRAN* iii, no. 671.

³⁵⁸ Hudson, "Nigel," *ODNB*, 3. Stringer, "Senlis, Simon de," 1.

³⁵⁹ *CAR*, 285, 286-287; *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2126, no. 2131.

³⁶⁰ John Hudson, *The Formation of the English Common Law Law and Society in England from the Norman Conquest to Magna Carta* (London and New York, 1996), 109.

throne. Yet Abbot William did not arrive in Ramsey until 1161, seven years after Stephen's death. This means that the abbey, or the abbot, was not able to fully regain lost lands through redress to royal justice. Considering that they had multiple charters proving their rights, including one from Henry I, this history suggests that justice was not always easily attainable during Stephen's reign. Of course when the issue finally was resolved the abbot did so irregularly. But this decision must have been a personal choice since Henry II offered the abbey support for their ownership of Woodwalton in the first few years of his reign.³⁶¹ Of course, the additional problem of Ernald was particular to Stephen's reign. In addition, Ralph of Normanville may well have been opportunistically reacting to the abbey's weakness in an attempt to make a gain. So in Woodwalton's case, it seems that troubles during Stephen's reign combined both normal problems and specific challenges linked to the king's reign.

Over, Cambridgeshire

Ramsey dealt briefly with another long-term case of wrongfully held land during Stephen's reign. The case has been discussed at length by Hudson and a brief recapitulation of the main facts should suffice.³⁶² Over, Cambridgeshire, held by Ramsey since before the Conquest, was originally granted to William Pecche as a life tenure associated with himself and his wife Alfwen.³⁶³ His descendants were loath to relinquish the land after William's death, and the abbey did not succeed in abstracting it from Pecche claims until the reign of Henry III.³⁶⁴ Ramsey's actions concerning Over during Stephen's reign are largely unknown. Hudson offers the possibility that Stephen may have been the king who permitted Hamo Pecche, William's son by his second marriage, to receive a life-grant in his own right.³⁶⁵ In any case, in 1139 Abbot Walter obtained a papal charter, not a royal writ, to cement his house's claim to Over.³⁶⁶ This papal support was repeated in 1140 in another general confirmation from Innocent II.³⁶⁷ Aside from these mentions of Over, Ramsey's cartularies do not record the abbot or chapter working to reclaim their lands during 1135-1154. This silence could be explained by Hamo's possession of a new life grant rather than the troubles of the time. Although the abbey could not dispossess him during his life, the papal charters would help

³⁶¹ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2131. The charter exists as an original as well as in the *CMR* and *CAR*.

³⁶² John Hudson, "Life-Grants of Land and the Development of Inheritance in Anglo-Norman England," *Anglo-Norman Studies* XII, ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Woodbridge, 1990), 67-80.

³⁶³ *CAR*, 233.

³⁶⁴ *CMR* ii, 368.

³⁶⁵ Hudson, "Life-Grants," 69.

³⁶⁶ *CMR* ii, 144.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

make the abbey's case upon Hamo's death. The case of Over is somewhat of an odd fit in a study of wrongs during Stephen's reign. The issue seems to have begun before or at the very beginning of this period. Nonetheless a few conclusions can be drawn. Cases of irregular possession of church lands were by no means limited to the unsettled period of Stephen's reign. In addition, it should be noted that Walter took action to stake a claim to church lands even before Geoffrey de Mandeville's invasion threw Ramsey's lands into turmoil. Finally, Abbot Walter sought papal aid in regaining his right to his lands. In all it is clear that although Stephen's ability to govern England was far greater than in 1141, even in these relatively early days of his reign the king was not a guaranteed recourse for the abbey. At least in the case of Over, Stephen was not the source of the justice Ramsey was looking for.

Stetchworth, Cambridgeshire

Another case study, Stetchworth, sheds additional light on the issue of land disputes in Stephen's reign and how they affected the Fenland houses. In this case Nigel attempted to resume land, deal with an episcopal donation (though not his own), and interact with the chapter. The case shows something of the difficulties that Nigel faced in resuming lands and reveals the tenacity of the chapter in defending its real estate. Book Three of the *Liber Eliensis* records the dispute in narrative, in letters from ecclesiastical authorities, and in a royal writ. Since the monks were an interested party in the case, the fact that its details exist in their history might suggest a one-sided telling of the conflict, but neither episcopal nor papal letters unequivocally support Ely's position.

Before considering the conflict under Stephen, a brief overview of the manor's history will inform the situation. From the late tenth century the Cambridgeshire manor of Stetchworth belonged to Ely.³⁶⁸ In the years following the Conquest, its possession was regularly if not significantly troubled. A few years after Hastings, c. 1071 x 1075, William ordered a plea headed by Geoffrey of Coutances, Remigius of Lincoln, and others to ascertain Ely's losses in general. They found minor losses in Stetchworth.³⁶⁹ Furthermore, about a decade later, Domesday itself records different problems.³⁷⁰ Domesday's final verdict on Stetchworth was that Ely held eight and a half hides and a half virgate valued at £10 with

³⁶⁸ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. II, ch. 67, p. 139.

³⁶⁹ *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum: The Acta of William I, 1066-1087*, ed. David Bates (Oxford, 1998), 410.

³⁷⁰ Cambridgeshire, 190v., Phillimore, 5.1-2.

others holding small parts of the estate.³⁷¹ Although the abbey had not lost significant amounts of Stetchworth, the land was certainly subject to regular minor infringements.

The better-documented claim to Stetchworth began during the bishopric of Hervey, 1109-1131.³⁷² The bishop granted the manor as well as those at Pampisford and Little Thetford to his nephew, William, whom he also made Archdeacon of Ely.³⁷³ Early in his episcopate, Nigel attempted to rectify this loss of lands amongst others. He held a plea at Wandlebury, southeast of Cambridge, and apparently succeeded in reclaiming Stetchworth.³⁷⁴ When, following the collapse of Ranulf's scheme, Nigel apportioned lands to the monks' use in 1137 x 1139, he included Stetchworth.³⁷⁵ Although it is possible that the turmoil of the rebellions of Nigel and Geoffrey caused intervening events to be left unrecorded, for the next few years, the estate seemed settled.

In the early 1150s, Stetchworth once again became a point of contention in a case that the *Liber Eliensis* unfolds over fourteen chapters.³⁷⁶ The facts are, briefly, as follows: Henry, son of archdeacon William gained papal endorsement of his claim to Stetchworth, and this success suggests his claim was plausible.³⁷⁷ Nigel attempted to oppose him but failed when Archbishop Theobald and Hilary, Bishop of Chichester, backed Henry. The monks of Ely persisted by means both fair and questionable to prevent the loss of their lands and eventually succeeded when a new judge appointed by Eugenius III, Gilbert, Bishop of Hereford, ruled against Henry.

In the close study of Stetchworth, three themes regarding the house's attempts to hold onto land emerge. First, Nigel in this case was an ally of the monks, but one with limited capacities. When Henry first claimed the estate Nigel stopped him.³⁷⁸ However, after Henry appealed to Theobald, Nigel seemed powerless to win Ely's case against him.³⁷⁹ The *Liber's* author claims that Henry falsely accused Nigel, and that Theobald and Hilary were not only

³⁷¹ Cambridgeshire, 190v., Phillimore 5:1-2; Cambridgeshire, 195v., Phillimore 14:76; and Cambridgeshire, 199r., Phillimore 25:50.

³⁷² Miller briefly summarizes this conflict noting that "the prior and convent of Ely had a long and interesting struggle with [Archdeacon William's] son Henry, who had usurped their rights in the manor of Stetchworth." Miller, *Ely*, 168-169.

³⁷³ The dating is frustratingly vague for both William Brito's appointment and Hervey's grant(s). *EEA* 31, nos. 12-13; Miller, *Ely*, 280. *LE*, ed. Blake, "Appendix C," 403-404.

³⁷⁴ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 48, pp. 287-288.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 54, p. 299-301. Papal charters of Innocent II and Lucius II copy Nigel's list of properties including Stetchworth. *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 56, pp. 302-305 and ch. 85, pp. 330-332.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 96-100, pp. 344-350; ch. 103-104, pp. 351-353; and ch. 108-114, pp. 355-362. Blake discussed the chronology in *LE*, pp. 405-407.

³⁷⁷ The *Liber* notes William was by then deposed, for unstated reasons. *Ibid.*, bk. III, 96, 344-345 and "Appendix C," 403-404.

³⁷⁸ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 96, pp. 344-345.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 96, pp. 344-345.

sympathetic to Henry's charges but helped him to accuse Nigel because "he had started forming the disturbance in the kingdom with [his] flatteries of treacherous people."³⁸⁰ The *Liber* notes Nigel's view of his precarious position: "furthermore he was still scarcely sure of the king's favour."³⁸¹ Then, according to the *Liber*, Nigel followed the advice of Theobald and Hilary and gave Henry what he wanted. The facts of the matter may have been that Theobald and Hilary thoroughly reviewed the evidence and found in Henry's favor, leaving Nigel no choice but to grant possession of Stetchworth to him. But the monks had a plausible way to rationalize Nigel's decision: his poor relationship with Stephen prompted an unjust attack on the disgraced bishop. The monks did not have to argue that their bishop sided with a lawful court decision, but instead claimed that politicking forced him into a bad situation. The monks did not merely keep this story as their own view of events; they also alluded to it when writing to Eugenius III in defense of their land. They note that "the venerable man, our lord and bishop" was prevented by "unjust and hindering causes."³⁸² Even if his desire was benevolent, Nigel's ability to sway a case in Ely's favor was sorely lacking. Although the fault may have been Nigel's, it is clear that the bishop's power was weakened during Stephen's reign.

Secondly, although documents were important, the testimony of witnesses was vital. During the first round of appeals, Theobald and Hilary appointed William Bishop of Norwich and Abbot Ording of Bury St Edmunds to hold a local inquest. When informing the pope of the results, William stressed that the people close to the situation "in one voice" denied Henry's rights to the land and claimed that only ill-gotten seals and false letters supported Henry's case.³⁸³ Ely also struggled to get good witnesses. When one Joseph attempted to prosecute Henry before Theobald and Hilary, Joseph's witnesses fell short of the judges' approval.³⁸⁴ Eventually Ely's case was won before Gilbert of Hereford when he found that Henry's own witnesses did not firmly support his contentions.³⁸⁵ Gilbert allowed Henry another chance to prove his case, but he could not.³⁸⁶ If Ely were to regain lands, the house needed witnesses to ensure that their claims were validated. These examples of cases being heard at court and witnesses being summoned also shed light on how Stephen's reign

³⁸⁰ "Quod seditiosorum adulationibus perturbationem incoasset in regno..." Ibid., bk. III, ch. 96, p. 345.

³⁸¹ "Insuper de regis adhuc amicitia minime confidebat." Ibid., bk. III, ch. 96, p. 345.

³⁸² "Venerabilis vir dominus et episcopus noster ... iniustis ... impediens causis." Ibid., bk. III, ch. 103, p. 351.

³⁸³ "Una vox." *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 98, p. 348.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., bk. III, ch. 100, p. 349.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., bk. III, ch. 108, p. 358.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., bk. III, ch. 108, p. 358.

affected the monasteries. The process of regaining lands held illegitimately often required lengthy legal proceedings. A monastic house might need to attend a variety of courts over several years. Such hearings were unlikely to be possible during the worst of the turmoil, so even if the king himself were favorable to justice, the conditions on the ground might make it impossible for a church to seek justice during the time of war.

Finally, the king was largely absent and left the settlement entirely to ecclesiastical authorities. Stephen is only mentioned twice in the proceedings. The first time that his name occurs it is merely to note that Nigel was not on the best of terms with him. The second mention is at the very end of the affair. When the pope finally ruled against Henry, he assigned Stetchworth to the monks but allowed Henry a year to present to Theobald and Gilbert evidence reasserting his rights.³⁸⁷ After the year elapsed, Gilbert and Theobald formalized the perpetual possession of Stetchworth to the monks.³⁸⁸ At some point during the dispute Henry had introduced other men, Ralph, Roger, and William de Halstede, onto the estate. Not only did Theobald and Gilbert single out these men to vacate the lands, but Stephen issued a writ commanding that they and William fitz Baldwin leave Stetchworth with no injury to the monks.³⁸⁹ Since the pope's one-year deadline was issued at the end of September 1153, Stephen's charter must have been issued in the last month of his life.³⁹⁰ Although the king had not been helpful during Ely's pursuit of Stetchworth, the abbey gained his support at the very end.

Less well-documented cases: Offenses by Earls

Moving on from these well-attested cases, the Fenland abbeys suffered a number of less documented attacks from a range of aggressors. Some were of the highest rank in the Anglo-Norman realm and others scarcely appear in the documentation. A common theme bringing together many of these depredations is the attempt of would-be possessors to reclaim lands linked to their family. In some cases the lands taken from an abbey were tied to the wrongdoer's family. In others, it seems that the malefactor was trying to build up land or resources whilst his inheritance was out of his control. All the cases contribute to a sense that Stephen's reign was a precarious time for the Fenland houses with powerful men willing to help themselves to church resources.

³⁸⁷ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 109, p. 359.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 111-113, pp. 361-362.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 114, p. 362; *RRAN* ii, 269.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 110, pp. 360-361.

As attested by later documents included amongst the abbeys' cartularies, Simon II de Senlis was amongst the earls complicit in the wrongs against more than one of the fenland houses. In 1175, Simon III de Senlis granted a silver mark in his mill at Huntingdon to Ramsey.³⁹¹ His charter explains that the gift is for "the soul of my father who much oppressed that church in his days and for my soul likewise who much oppressed the aforementioned church in the time of war for my need."³⁹² Although not included as such, this mitigating excuse might have been designed to be applied to his father's case as well since he did not always hold his claimed inheritance. The Huntingdon and Northampton earldom was not definitively granted to Simon II until 1141 and even then it must be expected that Geoffrey de Mandeville in his rebellion might have targeted the lands of an earl who was a close supporter of the king.³⁹³ Whatever wrongs the father and son committed are otherwise unrecorded in extant Ramsey records. Perhaps amidst the massive upheaval of Geoffrey de Mandeville's invasion their oppressions were comparatively insignificant. On the other hand the Senlis wrongs may have been noted elsewhere and that comment was not included in extant Ramsey literature. In any case, the records' neglect of the Senlis family and their oppressions raises concern that other wrongs might have been lost from the historical record. In addition to wronging Ramsey, Simon II also seems to have assumed lordship over nine knights' fees that should have been held from the Abbot of Peterborough.³⁹⁴ Although Peterborough's account does not grant much detail, it is possible that Earl Simon was simply abusing his position as Stephen's man on the ground in Huntingdonshire and Northamptonshire.³⁹⁵ Both these records are valuable in offering some insight into the problems that the Fenland houses faced during Stephen's reign. One of Stephen's key supporters during the time of war harmed at least two of the houses neighboring his honour. If the king's closest adherents wronged houses with impunity, then others might do the same. In addition both cases survive only as brief mentions without detail. In the case of Ramsey the narrative account, focused on Abbot Walter, does not mention the oppressions of Simon II. Perhaps other cases of wrongs were also left unrecorded in monastic histories and without charters of redress have altogether faded from the historical record.

³⁹¹ *CMR* i, 255-6.

³⁹² "Pro anima patris mei, qui multum gravavit ecclesiam illam in diebus suis, et pro anima mea similiter, qui praedictam ecclesiam in tempore guerra pro necessitate mea multum gravavi." *CMR* i, 255,

³⁹³ Stringer, "Senlis, Simon de ... (d. 1153)," *ODNB*, 2004, 1.

³⁹⁴ *HC*, ed., Mellows, 128; King, *Peterborough*, 21-22.

³⁹⁵ Stringer, "Senlis, Simon de ... (d. 1153)," *ODNB*, 2004, 1.

A letter recorded in Thorney's *Red Book* shows that the house also suffered comital aggression from a Gilbert, Earl of Clare.³⁹⁶ The missive sent by Robert de Chesney, Bishop of Lincoln 1148-1166 to Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury 1138-1161 includes Earl Simon in Northampton as a witness of Earl Gilbert's donation. This must be Simon II de Senlis who died in 1153. Therefore the charter and attempted redress of wrongs dates from 1148 x 1153, late in Stephen's reign and well after the worst of the Fenland fighting had subsided. Although two members of the Clare family named Gilbert held the title of earl simultaneously during Stephen's reign, the Earl of Pembroke died in early 1148 so it must be his nephew, the earl of Hertford, whose donation was recorded by Bishop Robert.³⁹⁷

Earl Gilbert of Hertford's donation was in response to wrongs committed against Thorney, possibly whilst the earl attempted to fulfill his familial duties. Gilbert had surrendered himself to Stephen as a hostage on behalf of his maternal uncle Ranulf of Chester after Ranulf was arrested by Stephen in August 1146.³⁹⁸ Clearly, Gilbert viewed his family connections as important enough to risk his person and possessions to relieve his uncle's arrest. When Ranulf then rebelled against Stephen, the king forced Gilbert to surrender his castles. Having done so, Gilbert promptly joined Ranulf's uprising. At this point his paternal uncle, Gilbert fitz Gilbert, Earl of Pembroke, staked a claim to the valuable Clare possessions seized by Stephen. The Earl of Pembroke demanded that his nephew's castles be turned over to him "by hereditary right."³⁹⁹ When Stephen refused, Pembroke withdrew from court in a manner deemed suspicious by both Stephen and the author of the *Gesta Stephani*, and this apparently hostile attitude led to Stephen's campaign to seize Pembroke's castles.⁴⁰⁰ Although the falling out of the Clare earls and the king was short-lived, the consequences lasted longer, and Pembroke never regained his castle at Pevensey.⁴⁰¹ More importantly for Thorney, the Earl of Hertford was left without his possessions for a period of time. This

³⁹⁶ *RB Thorney* ii, 207r. The charter is also printed in *EEA IV Lincoln 1186-1206*, ed. David M. Smith (London, 1986), no. XVIII, pp. 198-199.

³⁹⁷ Davis, *Stephen*, 3rd ed., 133. Gilbert fitz Richard was Earl of Pembroke, and his nephew Gilbert fitz Gilbert was made Earl of Hertford in 1138. Davis suggests that Gilbert fitz Richard may also have been made earl in 1138; King leaves it vaguely at "the beginning of the civil war in England." *Stephen*, 131; M. T. Flanagan, "Clare, Richard fitz Gilbert [*called* Strongbow], second earl of Pembroke [earl of Strigui] (c. 1130-1176)," *ODNB* (2004) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5447>, accessed 20 November 2018], 1.

³⁹⁸ *GS*, 200.

³⁹⁹ "iure hereditario." *GS*, 200-201.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 200-205. Davis proposed that Stephen was motivated in part by a desire to gain the rape of Pevensey, originally part of the Mortain inheritance, and grant it to Eustace to fill out his son's lands. *Stephen*, 3rd ed., 240-241.

⁴⁰¹ Davis noted that Pembroke was reconciled before his death in 1148, and Hertford was reconciled between 1148 and 1153. *Stephen* 3rd ed., 133.

period is likely what the Bishop of Lincoln refers to in a letter to Archbishop Theobald when noting that the earl could not immediately fulfill his promised donation.

While Earl Gilbert of Clare had inflicted many losses on many churches for which he incurred the imposition of excommunication; he had violently afflicted the Church of Thorney with serious and excessive troublesome [actions] At length, desiring to give satisfaction to the aforementioned church and to the abbot and to the brothers of the same place, he came to Northampton and in our presence and [that] of many religious persons and Earl Simon and many other barons, he made a settlement with the abbot and brothers of Thorney; for the inflicted losses and wrongs giving and granting to them one hundred shillings' worth of land from his own inheritance of which he is going to make full investiture to them in the first half year in which he will regain possession of his inheritance.

Indeed he gave and granted this holding to be possessed freely and quietly in perpetual alms. In order that one might better believe it and so that it might be a sure agreement, he swore in our presence that he would maintain it forever.⁴⁰²

From this charter several facts bear mentioning. The earl's depredations were not exclusively directed towards Thorney. It was merely one of the "many churches" which he victimized. Furthermore the wrongs were, perhaps in his own words and certainly in a charter that he accepted, "serious, excessive, and troublesome." Considering that Thorney has no narrative source for this period, this charter is a window on the house's experience of Stephen's reign. The wrongs were of course able to be righted, and Earl Gilbert arranged to do so before he had the wherewithal to fulfill his agreement. Gilbert was generous in his promises. He would gladly grant Thorney land in the future for forgiveness that day. Perhaps all the parties were convinced that Gilbert's path back to royal favor was assured and that the earl would be both able and willing to keep his word. As it turned out, Gilbert was restored to

⁴⁰² Cum multa pluribus ecclesiis intulisset dampna Gislebertus Comes de Clara pro quibus anathematis innodationem incurrerat: ecclesiam Thorneiensem gravibus & immoderatis incommodis violenter afflixerat: tandem prefate ecclesie satisfacere volens & abbati fratribusque eiusdem loci adfuit Northampton & in presentia nostra & multarum religiosarum personarum & Comitis Simonis & aliorum plurium baronum: fecit compositionem [ms "composi-onē"] cum Abbate & fratribus Thorneye donans & concedens eis pro illatis dampnis & iniuriis: centum solidatas terre de propria hereditate sua de qua plenariam facturus est eis investituram primo dimidio anno quo recuperabit hereditatem suam. Hanc siquidem dedit & concessit teneuram [ms "tenuram"] in elemosinam perpetuam & libere & quiete possidendam. Quod ut ei melius crederetur & ut firma esset compositio: iuravit in presentia nostra se finaliter tenere. *RB Thorney* ii, 207r.; *EEA* IV, no. xviii.

Stephen's good graces although the earl lived only until 1153.⁴⁰³ Perhaps as a result of his early demise the promised donation was never made good.⁴⁰⁴

Although the charters of Simon III de Senlis and Gilbert Earl of Hertford were granted at least two decades apart, there are some interesting parallels with each other and, to some degree, with Geoffrey de Mandeville's violence against Ramsey. Both the Senlis and Clare families lost control of lands that they claimed through the tumult of Stephen's reign. The loss is recorded not only in other sources but also in their charters attempting to right wrongs. In fact, neither earl had regained possession of his lands at the point of his promise of redress. These two charters suggest that at least some great barons were comfortable wronging churches when their needs were pressing, but that they would also attempt some degree of rectification. Whether this model would also have applied to Geoffrey de Mandeville is impossible to prove, but his personal interactions with Abbot Walter of Ramsey suggest that he too may have offered some restitution to regain the favor of God and church had he been restored to peace with Stephen. Yet possible future restitutions did not alter the realities of life for the Fenland houses during much of Stephen's reign. On a day-to-day basis they faced a variety of men who pilfered their possessions and threatened their well-being. The fact that some of these malefactors were dealing with challenges of their own and might right their wrongs can have provided little solace to monks facing the loss of lands and income.

Not all comital wrongdoing can be directly connected to war. In 1158 Adrian IV wrote to Archbishop Theobald, Archbishop Roger, and all England's bishops regarding the papacy's protracted campaign to force Nigel of Ely to resume his house's possessions.⁴⁰⁵ Although the pope agreed with Theobald and Henry II's request that Nigel not be suspended, he continued to insist upon wrongs being righted. Adrian ordered that William, Earl of Warenne, the Earl of Clare, Earl Aubrey, Geoffrey Martel, Henry fitz Gerald, Robert fitz Humphrey, and John de Port be brought together. They were to restore "all possessions of the church of Ely which they presume to withhold through violence and against justice."⁴⁰⁶ The Clare earl is most likely Roger de Clare, second earl of Hertford and the younger brother of the Earl Gilbert who had wronged Thorney. William Earl of Warenne must be Stephen's

⁴⁰³ Richard Mortimer, "Clare, Roger de, second earl of Hertford (*d.* 1173)," *ODNB* (2004) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5449>, accessed 20 November 2018], 1.

⁴⁰⁴ *EEA* IV, no. xviii.

⁴⁰⁵ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 127-129, pp. 376-379. In earlier letters Adrian refers to instruction along the same lines from Eugene III who reigned 1145-1153. *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 123-124, pp. 373-374.

⁴⁰⁶ "Omnes possessiones Elyensis ecclesie, quas per violentiam et contra iustitiam ... detinere presumunt." *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 127, p. 376.

younger son William who married Isabelle, the only child and heir of William de Warenne, third earl Warenne or Surrey.⁴⁰⁷ The final earl was Aubrey de Vere, Earl of Oxford, Geoffrey de Mandeville's brother-in-law and one-time partisan.⁴⁰⁸ Although neither the papal nor archiepiscopal letters explain how or why the named men wronged Ely, in some cases connections can be made to lands once held in their families.

Warenne may here have been seeking "family" lands. When Theobald wrote to Nigel regarding these issues, most likely in 1157, he listed three specific properties: Rattlesden, Suffolk; Marham, Norfolk; and Hartest, Suffolk.⁴⁰⁹ Marham had ties to the earl as related in the *Liber Eliensis*. Located in western Norfolk, Marham first appears in the *Liber* in 1029-35 when Abbot Leofsige, "by the will and favour" of Cnut, included it among the demesne lands divided for annual provision.⁴¹⁰ At some point in the 1040s or 1050s Abbot Wulfric handed over part of Marham and other estates to his brother Guthmund in a personal and oral agreement that would permit Guthmund to have enough lands to make a desired marriage.⁴¹¹ After Wulfric's wrongdoing came to light, he became ill and eventually died of the illness in 1066. Guthmund declined to return the lands, but negotiated from Abbot Thurstan (1066-1072) a life-tenancy.⁴¹² This agreement was quickly followed by the Normans' arrival and the property was then lost to Hugh de Montfort who gained all of Guthmund's lands.⁴¹³ Domesday shows several Marham landholders including a subtenant of Hugh. Ely's return does not list an overall hidage in Marham but shows ploughs in demesne.⁴¹⁴ Following the three ploughs, assorted people, livestock and value of £10, the return declares that "27 Freemen were attached to this manor ... with all customary dues, but after King William arrived Hugh de Montfort had them except for 1; W(illiam) of Warenne (has) 1 Freeman, at six acres from the church."⁴¹⁵ Hermer of Ferrars' Norfolk return notes that the 20 acres Thorketel held in Marham were "part of the jurisdiction of St. Æthelthryth" and that "this land is measured in the return of [the saint]."⁴¹⁶ Hugh de Montfort's return says both that Walter holds 26 freemen in Marham, but "St. Æthelthryth held [them]" and that Hugh

⁴⁰⁷ Victoria Chandler, "Warenne, William de, third earl of Surrey [Earl Warenne] (c. 1119-1148)," *ODNB* (2004) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28738>, accessed 20 November 2018], 1.

⁴⁰⁸ Crouch, David, "Vere, Aubrey de, count of Guines and earl of Oxford (d. 1194)," *ODNB* (2007) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28204>, accessed 20 November 2018], 1.

⁴⁰⁹ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 126, p. 375. Saltman affirms the date, Avrom Saltman, *Theobald Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1956), 324-325.

⁴¹⁰ "Nutu et favore." *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. II, ch. 84, p. 152; Miller, *Ely*, 38.

⁴¹¹ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. II, ch. 97, pp. 166-167.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, bk. II, ch. 97, pp. 166-167. Wulfric and Thurstan's dates are assigned by Blake. *Ibid.*, p. 413.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, bk. II, ch. 97, pp. 166-167.

⁴¹⁴ Norfolk, 212r., Phillimore, 15:1.

⁴¹⁵ Norfolk, 212r., Phillimore, 15:1.

⁴¹⁶ Norfolk, 205v., Phillimore, 13:1.

“acquired this land by exchange.”⁴¹⁷ Finally the Earl of Warenne’s return states that “Ralph hold ½ c. of land ... which St. Æthelthryth held before 1066.”⁴¹⁸ Domesday shows a complicated situation in which Ely had clearly lost land and freemen, but retained some possessions as a tenant-in-chief. The wording of the *Liber*’s account of the Wandlebury Plea gives no sign of how much of the manor Nigel recovered nor whether the recovery was into demesne or merely an affirmation that Ely was tenant-in-chief of all Marham lands. In either case, by the late 1150s Marham was not entirely in Ely’s hands, as Theobald’s letter shows.⁴¹⁹ The papal and archiepiscopal letter writing seems to have resulted in a return of Marham. In the late 1150s Nigel granted “the manor of Marham to the monks of Ely perpetually ... to supplement their food and to increase and strengthen the charity and hospitality of the house.”⁴²⁰ This grant did not remain to benefit the monks for perpetuity: Miller notes that Marham was granted to the earl of Warenne in fee in 1200.⁴²¹ In this case the persistence of the earl and his heirs proved more powerful than papal and archiepiscopal edict.

In a similar way, the Earl of Clare had a tangential claim to Hartest, Suffolk. The manor first came to Ely when Leofsige, the future abbot, joined Ely as a boy, most likely in the first years of the eleventh century.⁴²² Leofsige later assigned the manor to provide one week of food for Ely.⁴²³ Domesday does not show any significant problems of land alienation. The abbey held five carucates as a manor worth £11, four freemen with thirty acres for 5 shillings, and – through their tenant Berner the crossbowman – one freeman with one carucate for 20s.⁴²⁴ Richard, the son of Count Gilbert, held two free men with two carucates worth £2 as tenant-in-chief.⁴²⁵ Although it is possible that the Clares snatched these two men from Ely, Domesday records no objection on behalf of St Æthelthryth, a common appearance in other Domesday entries. The next time Hartest appeared was in Theobald’s letter commanding Nigel to gather lost lands, and Adrian IV’s on the same theme.⁴²⁶ Against the backdrop of this clear command, is a charter issued in 1155 x 1158 in which Nigel informed the honour court of Ely that he “had given and granted” to William de Camera a

⁴¹⁷ Norfolk, 238r., Phillimore, 23:9.

⁴¹⁸ Norfolk, 159r., Phillimore, 8:15.

⁴¹⁹ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 126, p. 375.

⁴²⁰ “Monachis Elyensis ecclesie perpetualiter villam de Marham ... ad supplementum victus eorum, et ad caritatem et hospitalitatem domus augmentandam et corroborandam.” *EEA* 31, no. 40.

⁴²¹ Miller, *Ely*, 169-170, 174.

⁴²² *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. II, ch. 74, pp. 143-144.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, bk. II, ch. 84, pp. 152-153.

⁴²⁴ Suffolk, 382r-v., Phillimore, 21:11.

⁴²⁵ Suffolk, 392v., Phillimore, 25:48.

⁴²⁶ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 126, p. 375

portion of Hartest.⁴²⁷ In explaining the background the charter notes that the vill “was divided by his barons and by the barons of the Earl of Clare.”⁴²⁸ Exactly what transpired in Hartest behind the papal and archiepiscopal letters and this charter is perhaps impossible to know. Nigel seems to have done something wrong and the Earl of Clare is the most obvious partner in crime, yet from Domesday it seems that both parties had some claim, though unequal, in the village. It seems that while the Clares retained their rights, Ely also managed to hold on to significant lands. Miller comments on Hartest not being farmed out in 1169-1173 and on leases being carved from the demesne in the late twelfth century and again in the second half of the thirteenth.⁴²⁹ In this case there are many questions that have no absolute answers. What wrong did the Earl of Clare commit, must it be associated with Hartest, and was the wrong from Stephen’s reign? Only the last can be answered with some certainty. The papal command to Nigel that referred to the earl came early in the reign of Henry II and was almost certainly referring back to wrongs from the previous reign. But although most details are obscure, the clear fact is that the Earl of Clare wronged Ely. He enters the list of many malefactors who harmed the Fenland houses in the time of war.

Although the third earl named by Adrian IV, Aubrey de Vere, cannot be connected to lands named in Archbishop Theobald’s letter, the third piece of land from Theobald’s letter has two potential comital aggressors.⁴³⁰ The Suffolk manor of Rattlesden was clearly Ely’s possession before the Conquest. It was originally given by an Anglo-Saxon donor, Aelfwaru, in the early eleventh century and under Cnut was listed as being responsible for two weeks of food for the abbey.⁴³¹ In Domesday the manor was held by the abbey, but scattered men were held by the Count of Mortain, the Clare progenitor Richard fitz Gilbert, Count Eustace of Boulogne, and William of Warenne, Earl of Surrey.⁴³² At some point during Stephen’s reign either the Earl of Warenne or an Earl of Clare might conceivably have effected claims that were harmful to Ely based upon the minimal holdings of their antecessors. But as Adrian’s listing of wrongdoers does not supply the corresponding crimes, and Theobald’s list of lands does not also list malefactors, this connection is speculative. The clear fact is that Rattlesden was amongst the lands wrongfully taken from the house.⁴³³ Unlike in other cases, there seems

⁴²⁷ “Dedisse et concessisse” *EEA* 31, no. 91.

⁴²⁸ “Partita fuit per barones meos et per barones comitis de Clara.” *Ibid.*, no. 124.

⁴²⁹ Miller, *Ely*, 99 n., 121, and 100 n.

⁴³⁰ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 127-129, pp. 376-379; ch. 126, p. 375.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, bk. II, ch. 61, p. 132-133 and ch. 84, pp. 152-153.

⁴³² Suffolk, 291r., Phillimore, 2.2; Suffolk, 303r., Phillimore, 5.2; Suffolk, 363r., Phillimore, 14.61; Suffolk, 381v., Phillimore, 21.1-2; Suffolk, 391r., Phillimore, 25.26; Suffolk, 398r., Phillimore, 26.1.

⁴³³ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 126, p. 375.

to be no long-term confirmation of claims against the abbey, and therefore, Nigel may have successfully righted this wrong. Nevertheless this is another example of the losses experienced by Ely during Stephen's reign. The house repeatedly suffered, often at the hands of the country's most powerful nobles.

Some conclusions are clear from this study of earls who wronged Fenland houses. There is no standard description of an earl who wronged an abbey as an adherent of one side or another of the conflicts of Stephen's reign. The best-known earl fighting in the Fens was Geoffrey de Mandeville whom Round made infamous for changing sides between Stephen and Matilda in a quest for greater power. Even if Round's characterization is less than accurate, Geoffrey certainly sided with both at certain times. Furthermore, there is no certainty that he was fighting on the Empress's behalf during his uprising. Other earls who opposed Stephen did not support Matilda. When the Clare earls rebelled there is no clear link to the Angevin cause. It seems more likely that they were attempting to regain lands and preserve their *amour-propre*. Thus the wrongs that they inflicted upon churches were likely to be based on self-interest rather than partisan warfare. Unlike the Clares, Earl Simon consistently supported the king. His opposition to Matilda probably stemmed from the certainty that she would grant his counties to her Scottish cousin if she won. Although he might also have wronged churches to benefit himself personally, it was in context of supporting a partisan position. Another earl who wronged houses, the Warenne earl of the 1150s, was Stephen's son and thus no supporter of Matilda's. In contrast to these earls tied to the king, Earl Aubrey was a less than consistent supporter of Stephen's, who shared ties with Geoffrey de Mandeville and received his English comital title as a gift from the Empress in 1141. As can be seen, the earls who wronged churches were not whole-hearted proponents of the king or of the Empress, although they tended to be royalist rather than Angevin in sympathy. This leaning is partially explicable by the geography: the Fens were closer to London than to Gloucester. Although the comital wrongs may be blamed on the warfare and unsettled times of Stephen's reign, the earls were not violating houses as partisans in the dispute over the throne.

Another conclusion is that the magnates were not merely snatching lands from beleaguered churches to fatten already broad estates. On the occasions that connections between "wrongs" and lands can be drawn, it seems likely that the earls were re-establishing historic family claims that were unjust or at best disputable. In the case of Gilbert of Clare and Simon de Senlis doing violence to Thorney and Ramsey, it seems that the earls were driven by deprivation of regular sources of income to meet their needs at the church's

expense. Finally, in the case of Ely, there is some suggestion that the bishop was implicated in furthering claims against his church. If true, this uncanonical course of action may well have been a result of his trying to preserve his position against dangerous rivals who enjoyed far more royal pleasure than Nigel ever managed after 1138. All in all it seems that either tenuous claims of a hereditary nature or the exigencies of the time were the impetus for the claims. When earls harmed the Fenland houses during Stephen's reign they were reacting to the lack of central power that would have assured them of their rights or punished their firmly punished their wrongs. They seemed to view damaging actions as a legitimate path to regain their rights.

Other Barons and Knights

The houses were also troubled by barons of lesser stature than the earls. Amongst the list of probable Ely wrongdoers were four further tenants-in-chief. Ramsey also suffered at the hands of this sort of mid-level barons. In some cases the wrongs seem to have stemmed from the common cause of hereditary claims to lands held by monastic houses.

The barons who potentially wronged Ely were a slightly mixed group. John de Port of Basing was an important baron who according to Edmund King “had managed to stay out of the headlines” during Stephen's reign, yet somehow was implicated in wronging Ely.⁴³⁴ Geoffrey Martel also fails to appear in accounts of Stephen's reign, but his father, William, was one of Stephen's most valued lieutenants.⁴³⁵ Whilst Geoffrey's *caput* lay in Dorset, he also had ties to East Anglia. When his father and mother established Snape Priory in Suffolk, Geoffrey joined in their donation of Snape and Aldeburgh manors.⁴³⁶ The two other listed barons, Henry fitz Gerald and Robert fitz Humphrey, were well situated to interact with the Fens. Henry fitz Gerald was steward to Geoffrey III de Mandeville, and he and his brother Warin received much of Eudo Dapifer's lands after Henry II's ascension and had a strong base in East Anglia.⁴³⁷ These lands had long been associated with Geoffrey II de Mandeville

⁴³⁴ King, *Stephen*, 289-290. John de Port witnessed the Westminster charter reconciling Stephen and Henry..The barony was based in Hampshire and also owed castle-guard at Dover. Sanders, *Baronies*, 9 and 105.

⁴³⁵ After William's capture at Wilton, Stephen ransomed him at great cost, surrendering Roger of Salisbury's castle at Sherborne. Crouch, *Stephen*, 207-208.

⁴³⁶ VCH *Suffolk*, ii, 79.

⁴³⁷ Keats-Rohan, *Domesday Descendants*, 893; Nicholas Vincent, “Fitzgerald, Henry (d. 1170x74),” *ODNB* (2004) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/48115>, accessed 20 November 2018], 1-2; Vincent discusses the connection between Eudo, the Mandevilles, and the Fitzgeralds at length in “Warin and Henry Fitz Gerald, the King's Chamberlains: the Origins of the Fitzgeralds Revisited” in *Anglo-Norman Studies XXI* ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 1999), 233-260.

whose mother was Eudo's daughter.⁴³⁸ Perhaps Henry fitz Gerald was inspired by this connection to hold monastic land claims lightly. Robert fitz Humphrey also had ties to an earl, being constable to Roger Earl of Clare. In 1166 he held two knights of other tenants-in-chief in Essex and was named in line to control the of one knight in Norfolk listed under Walter de Bec.⁴³⁹ While this list of men who wronged Ely demonstrates some variety in malefactors, without further clarification of the nature of their actions little that can be decisively said on any individual case. Overall it can be seen that the baronage took advantage of churches during the reign of Stephen. Once again, it may be that some culpability for Ely's poor treatment fell on Bishop Nigel since Adrian IV wrote to him "you deserved to undergo the judgment of suspension [from office]."⁴⁴⁰ But the greater guilt certainly lay with the barons who were to be threatened with excommunication unless the wrongs were righted.

Compared to these barons with loose ties to Ely, the de Scalers family had much closer connections to the abbey that they wronged. Hardwin de Scalers was a significant Domesday tenant-in-chief with holdings largely in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. The *Liber Eliensis* records several points of interaction between Hardwin and Ely; most are not complementary to the layman.⁴⁴¹ Hardwin had benefitted from the Conqueror's demands for knight service and Ely found it necessary to enfeoff him with land.⁴⁴² He was among those accused of at least one of two wrongs: holding thegnlands that belonged to the church and or failing to supply food from estates that were set up to feed the monks.⁴⁴³ It seems probable that Hardwin fell into the latter category if not both. In Domesday he is listed holding two and half hides, nine acres and a monastery in Shelford, Cambridgeshire. That manor had been assigned to two weeks of food provision during Cnut's reign.⁴⁴⁴ Based on complaints from Stephen's reign, some arrangement must have been made between the abbey and Hardwin, as he agreed to pay a rent. Following Hardwin's death his holdings were apparently split between two sons, Richard and Hugh: by Stephen's reign Richard's son Stephen held Richard's lands.⁴⁴⁵

⁴³⁸ Hollister, "Misfortunes," 24.

⁴³⁹ Keats-Rohan, *Domesday Descendants*, 307 and 915; *RB Exchequer*, 347-349, 352-353, and 401-2.

⁴⁴⁰ Meruisti suspensionis sententiam sustinere" *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 129, p. 378.

⁴⁴¹ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. II, ch. 114, p. 196; ch. 116, p. 198; ch. 121, p. 204, and ch. 134, p. 217.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, bk. II, ch. 134, pp. 216-217.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, bk. II, ch. 121, p. 204.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, bk. II, ch. 84, p. 153.

⁴⁴⁵ William Farrer, *Feudal Cambridgeshire* (Cambridge, 1920), 208-209.

During Stephen's reign Ely continued to suffer from poor service from their de Scalers tenants. In the aftermath of Nigel's rebellion and expulsion, Hugh and Stephen de Scalers apparently stopped paying their food rent. Likely in 1140, King Stephen wrote directly to the uncle and nephew, demanding that they either resume their payments or surrender their lands back to the monks of Ely; if not, Aubrey de Vere would distraint them.⁴⁴⁶ This command seems to have failed to provide an immediate response because Stephen again wrote, this time to Geoffrey de Mandeville (then a loyal servant), and ordered that "he distraint Hugh de Scalers and Stephen de Scalers therefore until they properly and fully deliver to the monks of Ely their farm which they owe to them just as ... they used to do before I captured the Isle of Ely."⁴⁴⁷ Geoffrey was apparently successful because the *Liber Eliensis* makes new no mention of the de Scalers until 1154 when the villainous behavior of Stephen de Scalers is related.⁴⁴⁸

The case of Stephen de Scalers resulted in a lengthy and detailed account recorded in the *Liber Eliensis*. In 1154 Stephen was holding the entirety of Hardwin's Shelford lands and neglecting to pay the monks their due. Under threat of anathema from a "maternal" Nigel of Ely, Stephen offered as an excuse that he was too poor to pay.⁴⁴⁹ Further complicating the situation, the specific lands that Stephen held were no longer marked out by boundary stones and "the aforementioned land of his [Stephen's] was altogether unknown even to the monks."⁴⁵⁰ Apparently hoping to salvage what they could from a bad situation, the monks discussed the issue with Nigel and came to an agreement with Stephen. He would be forgiven the arrears upon the condition that he help establish the boundary's location, pledge to pay in the future and bind himself to his due service to the monks. The *Liber Eliensis* records numerous witnesses to this matter on two different occasions. Nevertheless, the history has a generally unsatisfactory end. The monks were unconvinced that Stephen and his witnesses

⁴⁴⁶ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 76, pp. 323-324; *RRAN* iii, no. 264. Aubrey II de Vere died 15 May 1141. RaGena C. DeAragon, "Vere, Aubrey de (*d.* 1141)," *ODNB* (2004) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28203>, accessed 20 November 2018], 1-2.

⁴⁴⁷ "Constringas Hugonem de Scaliariis et Stephanum de Scaliariis donec ita bene et plenarie reddant monachis de Ely firmam suam quam eis debent, sicut ... faciebant priusquam caperem insulam de Ely." *LE*, III, 71, p. 320; *RRAN* iii, no. 265.

⁴⁴⁸ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 115, p. 363-364. The commentary on Stephen de Scalers intrudes into the flow of the Stetchworth narration.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 115, p. 363-364. This is one occasion in which the *Liber Eliensis* presents Nigel in a positive light. This outburst of charity may be a consequence of the chapter being written after the bishop's death.

⁴⁵⁰ *prefata terra ipsius monachis omnino etiam fuit incognita. Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 115, p. 363.

were accurate in laying out the borders and Stephen himself, as seemed right to the author, soon lost movement in his feet and never recovered it to the day of his death.⁴⁵¹

The Stephen de Scalers case has some parallels with Stetchworth in that it was a problem early in the reign and then again at the end. As with Stetchworth, it is possible that problems were ongoing during the reign, but that the monks did not have the wherewithal to pursue a legal case. It is, though, more likely that the withholding of rent was a new problem. The complaint specifically claims that Stephen “had kept back his farm from the ... monks for two years.”⁴⁵² It seems likely that Ely’s troubles with the de Scalers can first be traced to Nigel’s rebellion, and the later difficulties with Stephen de Scalers were not directly connected to the earlier ones. The reason behind Stephen’s failure to pay is unclear. Stephen’s claim of poverty cannot be definitely connected to the Fenland troubles of the reign as there is no certainty that the early 1150s were particularly problematic in the Fens. Yet the monks did not attack his case on those grounds, so he may have been telling the truth. Whether or not Stephen de Scalers was genuinely suffering, his actions show the threat of lost revenues from farmed out demesne. During periods of unrest in Stephen’s reign the practice of withholding rent must have been harder for the monks to combat. In this case Nigel’s intervention helped carry the day. While this action shows recourse to ecclesiastical authority rather than to the secular during Stephen’s reign, prelates were not always available to help their monks. During a considerable portion of Stephen’s reign Nigel was unable to assist his house. Political instability of the sort common during the time of war aggravated the challenges facing a monastic house.

Ramsey also had problems with local barons. Both Robert Foliot and Walter of Wahull were involved in some unspecified wrongs to the abbey, and Archbishop Theobald intervened on Ramsey’s behalf to command the men to cease from harassing the abbey.⁴⁵³ Whilst the archbishop’s action only survives in the table of contents of Ramsey’s cartulary, the brief record provides some key facts. Theobald wrote “to Robert Foliot, Walter of Wahull, and certain other invaders of the abbey, which by then had been completely devastated, that they desist.”⁴⁵⁴ Both named invaders were of local baronial stock. Walter of Wahull or Odell held an significant honor based in Bedfordshire, while Foliot will be

⁴⁵¹ While the *Liber Eliensis* accurately presents his death in the past, Stephan actually survived until 1167 or 1168 and returned a carta in 1166. *RBE*, 367-368. Keats-Rohan gives death dates. *Domesday Descendants*, 703.

⁴⁵² “firmam suam ... monachis per biennium detinisset.” *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 115, p. 363.

⁴⁵³ Saltman dates this to c. 1145. *Theobald*, no. 206, pp. 428-429; *CMR* i, 106.

⁴⁵⁴ “Roberto Foliot, Waltero de Wahille, et quibusdam aliis invasoribus abbatiae, omnino tunc destructae, quod desistant.” *CMR* i, 106.

discussed later in this thesis.⁴⁵⁵ Walter of Wahull's Domesday predecessor, Walter the Fleming, held a barony based in Odell, Bedfordshire, that was mainly spread throughout that county and Northamptonshire.⁴⁵⁶ He was succeeded by Simon of Wahull, "probably [his] son or grandson" according to Keats-Rohan, who was the father of Walter.⁴⁵⁷ Walter of Wahull had a sizeable estate, as shown by his *carta* recording the thirty knights he owed in 1166.⁴⁵⁸ The appearance of these two men in Theobald's letter gives evidence of the pressure on Ramsey from local barons. Whilst they were not the only ones to wrong the abbey, it is unclear whether they alone were named by Theobald or whether the cartulary's compiler cut off other names when creating the table of contents. In either case, the truncated message shows that at the moment when Ramsey was in dire need, Foliot and Wahull took advantage.

The details of the wrongs are lost, but a few points can be raised. First, whilst in some cases seizure of lands was based on inheritance claims, Walter of Wahull's action is perhaps unrelated to any such question. The only dispute between the Honour of Wahull and Ramsey that Domesday Book mentions is one of twelve acres of meadow in Barton-le-Clay, Bedfordshire, that the abbey claimed against Nigel d'Aubigny and Walter the Fleming.⁴⁵⁹ Although Walter of Wahull's invasion might relate to this, there is no certain connection. Second, Abbot Walter may have prompted the archiepiscopal intervention. According to the "Narratio," Walter sometimes made concessions with those who had seized lands, but he also sought "to recover lands that had been occupied by hostile men."⁴⁶⁰ This charter of Theobald's may well have been issued in response to an abbatial request. Finally there is no question that the unstable nature of Stephen's reign played out to an abbey's misfortune. The entry for Theobald's charter in the table of contents makes it clear that the wrongs occurred whilst the abbey was already devastated by earlier misfortunes. Although barons were known to wrong ecclesiastical lands through the middle ages, Ramsey's difficulties stemmed from the troubles of Stephen's reign and most particularly, from the rebellion of Geoffrey de Mandeville.

Not all baronial wrongs can be so clearly located during Stephen's reign, as evidenced by the case of William Mauduit who wronged Peterborough. Both Hugh Candidus and the

⁴⁵⁵ William Farrer, *Honors and Knights' Fees an attempt to identify the component parts of certain honors and to trace the descent of the tenants of the same who held by knight's service of serjeanty from the eleventh to the fourteenth century*, 3 vols. (London, 1923-1924, Manchester, 1925) i, 61-63.; *RB Exchequer*, 322-323. See below pages 92-93.

⁴⁵⁶ *VCH Bedfordshire*, iii, 69-70; Farrer, *Honors and Knights' Fees* i, 61-63.

⁴⁵⁷ Keats-Rohan, *Domesday Descendants*, 772.

⁴⁵⁸ *RB Exchequer*, 322-323

⁴⁵⁹ Bedfordshire, 210v., Phillimore 8.2.

⁴⁶⁰ *Terras ab inimicis hominibus possessas revocare. CAR*, 335.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle E record him amongst those wrongdoers from whom Abbot Martin reclaimed church lands.⁴⁶¹ According to Hugh, “Martin took Cottingham and Easton from William Mauduit of Rockingham.”⁴⁶² William II Mauduit came from an influential curial family, being the son of Henry I’s chamberlain, William I Mauduit, and the uncle by marriage of another, William de Pont de l’Arche.⁴⁶³ Once William II Mauduit joined the Empress in 1141 she recognized him as chamberlain.⁴⁶⁴ Mason notes that “during the remainder of the civil war ... [he kept] out of politics.”⁴⁶⁵ But it seems probable that his claiming of Peterborough lands was an attempt to set up a stronger base in the baronage since his family office of chamberlain and lands were held by his niece’s husband, William de Pont de l’Arche. The lands he claimed from Peterborough were also close to the castle of Rockingham, which Henry, Duke of Normandy, granted him in June 1153.⁴⁶⁶ Perhaps William held it earlier in Stephen’s reign and was trying to build up his lands around the castle. The Peterborough sources fail to specify whether Mauduit was staking a claim to the lands outright or if he was simply setting himself up as tenant on the lands. Whatever his goal may have been, he was unsuccessful in that venture. Nevertheless, a baron with loose ties to the Angevins managed to acquire lands on the Northamptonshire-Leicestershire border during Stephen’s reign. This was certainly a troubling time for Peterborough.

Rather lower down the social ladder than William Mauduit, Ralph of Normanville, who had ties to several magnates, wronged both Ramsey and Thorney.⁴⁶⁷ At some undated point before 1155 x 1157, Roger de Mowbray granted Empingham, Rutland, to Ralph.⁴⁶⁸ Ralph’s interactions with the Fenland houses were problematic. As discussed above, Stephen’s commanded Earl Simon to re-seise Ramsey of Woodwalton and that in so doing he should not allow Ralph of Normanville or anyone else to de-force the manor.⁴⁶⁹ Exactly how Ralph’s claim fits in amongst the troubles of Albreda’s heirs and the manor’s part in Geoffrey

⁴⁶¹ *HC*, ed., Mellows, 123; *The Peterborough Chronicle*, ed. Clark (Oxford 1970), 57.

⁴⁶² “Abstulit ... Willelmo Maleducto de Rogingham, Cottingham et Estun.” *HC*, ed. Mellows, 123. Cottingham, Northamptonshire and Great Easton, Leicestershire.

⁴⁶³ Emma Mason, “The Mauduits and their Chamberlainship of the Exchequer,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* vol. XLIX, no. 119 (May 1976), 1-23, 2-3.

⁴⁶⁴ *RRAN* iii, no. 581.

⁴⁶⁵ Mason, “Mauduits,” 3.

⁴⁶⁶ King, *Peterborough*, 21; *RRAN* iii, no. 582.

⁴⁶⁷ In 1145 x 1147 he was amongst many important witnesses to Ranulf’s grant to Robert of Leicester. *Charters of the Anglo-Norman Earls of Chester*, ed. Geoffrey Barraclough (*S.I.*, 1988), no. 82; In addition, “Ralph and Gerold de Normanvilla are witnesses to the foundation of the Abbey of St. Mary, co. Huntingdon, by Simon, Earl of Northampton.” George R. Sitwell, “Gerard de Normanville” *The Genealogist* (New Series), no. 13 (1897), 11-15, 15.

⁴⁶⁸ *Henry II Charters*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 1935.

⁴⁶⁹ *CAR*, 321. Macray dates the charter 1153 x 1154 probably due to its apparent passage after the events of the reign and Nigel’s presence as witness. *RRAN* iii, no. 671 gives a broader 1138-1153.

de Mandeville's rebellion is uncertain. During Stephen's reign Ralph also attempted to seize land of Thorney's. The *Red Book* has two charters relating to Charwelton, Northamptonshire, where Thorney held half an acre in Domesday.⁴⁷⁰ Both are datable to the abbacy of Robert, 1113-1151. While in the first charter Robert of Staverton at Yaxley quitclaimed his claim to inherit the vill, in the second Ralph of Normanville "was unjustly claiming" the land from the abbey.⁴⁷¹ But Ralph then repented and quitclaimed the land to Abbot Robert. Exactly what claim Ralph might have had to either property is undetermined. In addition, there does not seem to be a connection between him and Robert of Staverton. Although Ralph of Normanville's charter is not definitively datable to Stephen's reign, the other documents concerning him make the dating likely to be later rather than earlier in Abbot Robert of Thorney's abbacy. Without more details the most that can be said is that Ralph of Normanville seems to be a knight who was looking for places to gain advantage. He tried and failed at both Woodwalton and Charwelton. The case of Ralph de Normanville shows that not only the baronage, but even knights could try to take advantage of the turmoil accompanying Stephen's reign and make gains at an abbey's expense.

Another knightly wrongdoer was Robert de Broi, who took land from Ramsey and made a donation to Thorney. De Broi first appears in Thorney's cartulary as a witness to a donation by Payn de Beauchamp and his wife Rohese de Vere, the widow of Geoffrey de Mandeville.⁴⁷² He later appears in his son Walter's charters regarding grants to the abbey including one in which, "by the command of [his] father Robert," he granted land to Thorney.⁴⁷³ This charter itself does not indicate any wrong. On the other hand, Walter's Ramsey charter states that "Robert de Broi, at the point of death and knowing that he had heedlessly sinned against St Benedict and the church of Ramsey having violently invaded Crawley and cruelly held it against the church's right" returned the land to Ramsey through his son Walter.⁴⁷⁴ This restoration must have taken place before 1161 when Abbot Walter died and David Smith suggests that dating Robert de Chesney's charter confirming this

⁴⁷⁰ Northamptonshire, 222v, Phillimore 10,2. Other tenants-in-chief were the Count of Mortain and Hugh of Granmesnil, Phillimore 18, 36 and 66; 23,15. It seems that Thorney's manor was small with a population of nine. *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Northamptonshire*, iii, (London, 1981), 43.

⁴⁷¹ "Iniuste calumpniabat" *RB Thorney* ii, 420r.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 295r.

⁴⁷³ "Praecepto patris mei Rodberti." *Ibid.*, 296r.

⁴⁷⁴ "Robertus de Broi, in articulo mortis, intelligens se in Sanctum Benedictum et ecclesiam Ramesiae inconsiderate peccasse, Crauleiam, quam violenter invaserat, et crudeliter contra jus ecclesiae possederat..." *CMR* i, 257. Crawley could be Husbourne Crawley, Bedfordshire, or North Crawley, Buckinghamshire. Ramsey held land in Cranfield, Redbornstoke Hundred Bedfordshire that lay between both "Crawleys." I think that North Crawley is slightly more likely based upon its greater proximity to Cranfield. *CMR* i, 143.

restoration should possibly be narrowed to 1148 x mid-1150s.⁴⁷⁵ Robert de Broi had earlier appeared in a charter relating to Crawley when he witnessed the Foliot quitclaim of lands divided between Crawley and Cranfield, but there is no clear link suggesting that he had any claim on the land. As in the case of Ralph of Normanville, details as to why the knight chose a specific piece of land to invade must remain speculative, but de Broi had local connections that may have encouraged his actions.

Not every wrongdoer was so distant from the lands he invaded. In the final case of this study a tenuous family connection can be drawn. Robert Grimbald's interactions with Ramsey exemplify the frustrations of knowing parts, but not the whole story. Grimbald was likely the descendant of a Domesday subtenant, served as steward to David of Scotland in Huntingdonshire, served as sheriff of Huntingdonshire and Northamptonshire at points under Stephen, and married Matilda daughter of Payn of Houghton and thus granddaughter of William of Houghton.⁴⁷⁶ This marriage included a connection to Ramsey. William of Houghton, chamberlain to Henry I, had interacted with Ramsey twice in the abbey's charters. In 1114 Henry I confirmed Ramsey and William's transaction in which the abbey gained Wimbotsham, Norfolk, and William gained an exchange.⁴⁷⁷ Much later in his reign, perhaps in 1135, Henry I oversaw his chamberlain's return of the manor of Bradenache with a hide in Gidding, Huntingdonshire, in exchange for 100 silver marks.⁴⁷⁸ During Stephen's reign, Robert Grimbald managed to obtain an agreement gaining rights over land reported as Bradelach.⁴⁷⁹ No charter detailing this agreement survives, if it ever existed. But Henry II's charter that mentions the agreement refers to the land being that which William of Houghton quitclaimed to the abbey as the charter of Henry I witnesses. However, Henry I's charter is addressed to the sheriff of Huntingdonshire and Henry II's is to Hertfordshire.⁴⁸⁰ This difference in county names has led editors to suggest that the William of Houghton donation should be placed near Great Gidding in northern Huntingdonshire whilst the land that Robert Grimbald claimed was Brandish Wood, Therfield, Hertfordshire. Therfield was also granted

⁴⁷⁵ *EEA* 1, no. 225.

⁴⁷⁶ Farrer, *Honors and Knight's Fees* ii, 302-303; Keats-Rohan, *Domesday Descendants*, 518 and 999.

⁴⁷⁷ "Escambium." *CAR*, 227, *CMR* i, 245 and *RRAN* ii, no. 1064.

⁴⁷⁸ *CAR*, 284, *CMR* i, 250, and *RRAN* ii, no. 1915.

⁴⁷⁹ *CAR*, 288 and *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2133.

⁴⁸⁰ Although *RRAN* ii, no. 1915 states "notification ... addressed generally," *CMR* i, 250 reads "Henricus, Rex Anglorum, archiepiscopis ... et omnibus fidelibus suis de Hunteoneschire." On the other hand the *CAR*, 284 has "omnibus fidelibus suis totius Angliae" which must be why the *Regesta* notes it as a general address. The only other difference (which the *RRAN* ii does note) is a change of the second witness from the Bishop of Carlisle to Salisbury.

to Ramsey by William of Houghton.⁴⁸¹ While this suggestion may be correct, it might also be that the name of the county was miscopied, leading to confusion. In either case, Robert Grimbold acquired land associated with his wife's grandfather during Stephen's reign. Grimbold's taking possession of this land likely shows that he was claiming some sort of right to the land through his wife. Although such a claim might not hold much validity most of the time, during the time of war, such an argument might have been enough that Abbot Walter made an agreement establishing Grimbold a tenant of the abbey's. This arrangement would have permitted the abbey to retain a degree of tenure over the land when facing a threat to their possession. Once Henry II came to the throne, the abbey wasted little time appealing to the new king for the charter to be revoked: Henry II's writs to the abbey and sheriff are dated 1155 x 1158.

Conclusion

The history of Grimbold's possession and loss of Ramsey's manor is a good place to conclude this chapter as it illustrates several significant themes. First, in many of the wrongs done to the Fenland monasteries there is a strong connection with family lands, particularly in that the abbey's opponents often claimed a family tie to the land in question. In some cases such as that of Stetchworth and Over the family remained in possession. In other cases such as the Warenne and Marham connection or Grimbold's claim, the tie was less clear. In some cases the loss of family lands unconnected to a monastic house may have encouraged wrongs against it. For example, Geoffrey de Mandeville lost his family lands and needed others to replace them. His apparent aim was to regain his inheritance at which point Ramsey would no doubt have received back its land. Other wrongdoers such as William Mauduit and possibly Simon de Senlis also fall into this category.

Another theme is abbatial success in reclaiming lands. Time and again the monks were able to eventually regain possession of the lands that they claimed. Two abbots, Martin of Bec at Peterborough and Walter at Ramsey, were praised by their historians for managing to regain lands.⁴⁸² Of course, since the documents foundational to this study are from the houses themselves, it is not surprising that successes and not failures are largely recorded. But it is worth focusing on the fact that even in the nineteen years of Stephen's reign, Christ's

⁴⁸¹ *RRAN* ii, no. 1915 and *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2129 and 2133.

⁴⁸² Hugh Candidus, ed. Mellows, 123; *CAR*, 336.

servants in the Fens did not sleep and indeed they accomplished good deeds for their houses. Of course their successes are set against a rather dark backdrop of troubles.

Perhaps the largest lesson to be observed is that the Fenland houses suffered a great deal during Stephen's reign. Whether they were from earls, barons, or knights, troubles seemed to rain down on the monks. Not all may have been widely known. Geoffrey's actions were reported across England, other aggressions were aired in the papal court, and some are unknown but for charters repaying the wrongs. Furthermore the wrongs were often left unaddressed for years. Ramsey's regaining of Woodwalton did not occur until a new abbot arrived. Geoffrey de Mandeville's son took years to arrange restitution. There can be no doubt that the Fenland houses were repeatedly and grievously wronged during the nineteen years that Stephen was king.

Chapter Three: Prelates and their Houses

Introduction

In addition to considering the wrongs that the houses suffered, a study of the experience of the Fenland houses during King Stephen's reign must also look at the actions of the prelates. Answering the following questions will help shape an image of each Fenland prelate and his role in guiding his house during the time of war: How much attention did he give to his house? Was the prelate successful in helping his houses deal with problems? Did the prelate create or exacerbate problems? This examination is constrained by the limitations of the sources. Thorney, with the exception of passing rubrication comments, did not produce narrative history that covers Stephen's reign. The other three houses did produce histories during the reign of Henry II, but these are biased by their authors' support for or opposition to his house's former prelate. Although all the houses have extant documentation showing actions that their prelates took, the sources only cover a fraction of the many actions the abbots and bishop must have taken. Taking these problems into consideration, this chapter will first look at the two Fenland prelates who were involved in national politics to ask to what extent they can be held culpable for the suffering their houses underwent, a concern raised by the post-Stephen histories. It will then turn to the regular business conducted by a prelate and the resulting relationship with his monks. Some actions were unremarkable and others led to criticism of the prelate as being outwith the scope of acceptable behavior.

Disruptions at Ely and Ramsey

In the Fens two houses suffered considerably more than average. Not surprisingly they complained bitterly about their prelates. At Ely the monks thought that Nigel treated them badly in his role as their bishop and also took political actions that caused the house to suffer. His decision to rebel against Stephen resulted in the king's invasion as well as loss of land and revenues. The *Liber Eliensis* focuses its blame on specific wrongs that Nigel did, such as the loss of treasures, but it does record broader criticism of Nigel's role in encouraging the rebellions that shook Stephen's reign. When narrating the Stetchworth case the *Liber* presents as the viewpoint of Archbishop Theobald and Bishop Hilary of Chichester that the kingdom's troubles proceeded from Nigel's actions. Perhaps in relating this opinion, the author of the *Liber* allowed a higher authority than himself to blame Nigel for the greater problems of the time.

Taking a step back from the emotions of the *Liber*, the question remains: is there a case that Nigel significantly led to Ely's troubles? A quick assessment might say yes. Had he not rebelled, Stephen would not have needed to invade Ely in 1139-1140. Had Nigel's men not feared the king's motives when Geoffrey was rebelling, they might have held the Isle against him rather than welcoming him as an ally. Yet this judgment does not tell the whole story. From the Conquest through the late thirteenth century, Ely was an attractive location for rebels because of its naturally defensible location. In addition, other houses such as Worcester and Selby suffered during Stephen's reign without their prelates rebelling against the king.⁴⁸³ While Nigel's politics played a part in bringing troubles to Ely, he was not the sole cause. Even with a non-political bishop, Ely might well have been invaded. When assessing Nigel's role in Ely's suffering, he should be blamed only for the specific wrongs attributable to him. He took treasures and may have connived with earls and others to dispose of Ely's lands. These wrongs the house found culpable. Nigel certainly neglected the house for royal duty, but that apparent failure was not complained of. Although Nigel's actions played a considerable part in the troubles that Ely endured, they were not their sole cause.

In addition to Nigel at Ely, the other prelate blamed for his house's difficulties was Walter at Ramsey, where difficulties mainly stemmed from Geoffrey de Mandeville's invasion which followed quickly on the heels of Walter's departure for papal help. This chronological link might suggest a causal one as well. Did Walter's replacement by Daniel precipitate Geoffrey's invasion? Was Walter replaced because of Angevin sympathy on his part? If both these questions can be answered in the affirmative, then Walter's positions and actions did contribute to the dire experience at Ramsey; if not, perhaps Walter was largely a victim of unfortunate timing and circumstance. Since Geoffrey de Mandeville's invasion of Ramsey is the most significant story from the Fens during Stephen's reign, Walter's role will be examined at length.

There are well-stated claims regarding Walter's pro-Matilda stance. R. H. C. Davis enumerated three arguments to support the contention that Walter was disloyal to the king and supported Matilda: Walter's treaty with Nigel, Bishop of Ely, in 1141; Stephen's personal involvement in replacing Walter with Daniel; and the belief that Robert Foliot, David I's steward of Huntingdon, supported Walter.⁴⁸⁴ In addition, Edmund King questions Walter's loyalty based principally on Stephen's displeasure at Walter's success over Daniel

⁴⁸³ King, *Stephen*, 257-258, 298.

⁴⁸⁴ Davis, *Stephen*, 3rd ed., 79, n15.

in Rome.⁴⁸⁵ This view seems to align with Davis's second point, both of which point to Walter's relationship with King Stephen. Examining each of these claims more closely casts doubt on whether Walter can in fact be shown to be an Angevin supporter and thus complicates the straightforward explanation that Geoffrey attacked Ramsey to displace Daniel as a determined royalist.

There can be no conclusive proof that Walter was allied to Matilda based upon the charter reconciling him and Nigel of Ely. Karn dates this Westminster charter to sometime between 7 April and July 1141, but argues convincingly that it should most likely be narrowed to late June.⁴⁸⁶ Davis, calling the agreement both a "formal alliance" and a "formal treaty," uses it to show that Walter "sympathized with the Empress."⁴⁸⁷ Karn believes it shows "two Angevin supporters" working through their differences at Matilda's court.⁴⁸⁸ Perhaps both historians read too much into the agreement. It was fitting and appropriate that the abbot of Ramsey bring a long-term and apparently significant grievance to the royal court for redress. After Nigel's rebellion following Roger of Salisbury's death, the bishop of Ely did not frequent Stephen's court until after the king's restoration, and Walter was not the sort of abbot who enjoyed fulfilling the secular duties of his office.⁴⁸⁹ Therefore, it would be unlikely that the abbot of Ramsey would have traveled to Gloucester to confront Nigel in a court likely to be sympathetic to the bishop. By the time of the agreement in Westminster in late spring or early summer 1141, Matilda was in the process of obtaining rule over all of England. Furthermore, her court was attended by arguably the highest ecclesiastic of the land, Henry of Winchester. Matilda's court was clearly the place to bring disputes between churchmen. Therefore Nigel's charter, and the reconciliation behind it, should be read more as proof that Walter dealt with a problem when the opportunity arose rather than that he was a convinced Angevin. This may have been the first chance Walter had to address the issue in court with the bishop of Ely present, fulfilling his abbatial duty to Ramsey. Of course, it is possible that Walter was a firm Angevin supporter who from the death of Henry I desired nothing more than that Matilda be accepted as the ruling queen of England; however, the fact that he brought relief to his house and settled a disagreement with one of her supporters in Matilda's court when she was at the height of her ascendancy does not prove this.

⁴⁸⁵ King, *Stephen*, 198-199.

⁴⁸⁶ *EEA* 31, no. 72.

⁴⁸⁷ Davis, *Stephen*, 3rd ed., 77 and 79.

⁴⁸⁸ *EEA* 31, no. 72.

⁴⁸⁹ *CAR*, 327.

The second argument, that Stephen's involvement with Walter's resignation and Daniel's placement as abbot shows Walter to be an Angevin supporter, also cannot hold up to close scrutiny. Stephen's actions can be explained more simply by noting that he wanted Daniel to be abbot, he had a history of interfering with ecclesiastical appointments, and that his only objections to Walter are recorded when the abbot's reinstatement conflicted with his own desires.

The salient point of Daniel's promotion was that he, a supporter of the king, received the abbacy: Walter's resignation was necessary for Daniel's elevation, but only important because it opened a vacancy. As recorded in the *Gesta Stephani*, Stephen owed Daniel a debt for helping him to capture Ely when Nigel rebelled.⁴⁹⁰ The *Gesta* notes that a monk who knew the area around Ely helped Stephen across the Fens.⁴⁹¹ The *Gesta* does not name the monk but states that "in gratitude for this service, not by Peter's key but rather by Simon's, he was introduced into the church and called the Abbot of Ramsey."⁴⁹² The commentary then ends with a promise to relate more information where appropriate in the narrative. Despite this promise, the simoniac abbot makes no appearance in the *Gesta*'s discussion of Geoffrey's invasion.⁴⁹³ Nevertheless, it seems certain that this account speaks of Daniel and his career. The later local account of Daniel's usurpation of the abbacy gives the king no prominent role in displacing Walter. Instead it is through Daniel's lengthy machinations that the abbot is inveigled into resigning his position. Stephen merely accepts the abbot's choice and transfers the position to Daniel, who had a plausible claim to the role through his practice as the abbot's assistant. The *Narratio* also claims that Daniel bribed the king and members of the royal court. Thus neither the *Gesta* and the *Narratio* identify royal desire as a reason for Walter's removal. Instead the king owed Daniel for his services, and Daniel bribed the king: both factors helped Daniel gain Ramsey. Daniel's elevation was to favour him, not to degrade Walter. The choice of the *Narratio* to list only bribery as a cause may well stem from its author's fervent hatred of Daniel. Any anecdote that might present the pseudo-abbot in a good light, such as helping the king, might be excluded.

Furthermore, Stephen's reign saw regular interference in ecclesiastical appointments when it suited him, even in cases where he did not view individual prelates as enemies.⁴⁹⁴ Perhaps the most notable are his involvements in York on behalf of his nephews Henry of

⁴⁹⁰ *GS*, 100-101. "a certain monk very knowledgeable of the neighborhood of Ely."

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁹² "Ob huius seruitii gratiam non Petri sed Simonis potius clauē in ecclesiam introductum, abbatemque Ramensem uocatum." *Ibid.*, 100-101.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

⁴⁹⁴ Frank Barlow, *The English Church 1066-1154* (London, 1979), 92-103.

Sully and William fitz Herbert. Stephen also supported his brother's intervention in Durham on behalf of William of Ste Barbe and his nephew Hugh de Puiset. The case of St Benet's Holm provides an example of Stephen's direct involvement in an abbatial appointment.⁴⁹⁵ There the incumbent abbot, also named Daniel, was displaced to give a position to a royal nephew. In this situation there is no suggestion that Stephen had any animosity towards or concern about the incumbent; he merely occupied a position that the king wanted to give to his nephew. In fact, after the nephew's rather mixed career at St Benet's came to an early end, Stephen gave him Chertsey and reinstated the former abbot, Daniel. Throughout his reign Stephen had a history of treating the church in a fairly dictatorial fashion.

Similarly, there is no clear case that Stephen opposed Walter as abbot aside from his own desire to promote a monk to whom he owed a debt. Stephen's personal involvement in accepting Walter's resignation and installing Daniel could be judged – as Davis did – as grounds for assuming that Walter was in some way disloyal to the king.⁴⁹⁶ On the other hand King did not find that evidence sufficient on its own, but stated that Stephen's later anger over Walter's return with papal approbation points towards the king actively disliking Walter and wanting him gone, thus showing that the abbot was in some way an enemy of the king's.⁴⁹⁷ While the *Narratio* does show Stephen as an opponent to Walter after his return, it does not make clear that Stephen's attitude was based on some unspecified lack of loyalty. It may well have been that Stephen felt that Walter had undercut his authority by appealing to the pope to reverse the royal dispensation of an apparently vacant abbey. King claims that Stephen's active role, however sidelined in the original narrative, shows that the simple plot of wicked usurper scheming to replace his abbot "cannot be the whole story."⁴⁹⁸ But the sources, the *Narratio* in particular, suggest that Walter's removal was the result of a personal choice by the abbot, although his replacement was a royal appointment. Only when Stephen's placement of Daniel into Ramsey was stymied did the king show anger towards Walter. Since Stephen had a not insignificant history of interfering with ecclesiastical affairs his displeasure likely resulted from frustration rather than suspected disloyalty.

Thus Daniel's promotion at Walter's expense need not imply the abbot's disloyalty. When abbots were removed from office, this event was often reported elsewhere. I have found no other record of Walter's absence from the office being attributed to removal. Of

⁴⁹⁵ Ruth Harwood Cline "Abbot Hugh: An Overlooked Brother of Henry I, Count of Champagne," *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (Jul., 2007), 501-516.

⁴⁹⁶ Davis, *Stephen* 3rd ed., 79, fn. 15.

⁴⁹⁷ King, *Stephen*, 199.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

course, there can be no absolutely conclusive argument made from silence, but the record suggests that the process that led to Daniel replacing Walter was due to Daniel's initiative and Stephen's happy acquiescence.

The third argument in favor of regarding Walter as a pro-Angevin is even more tangential. Davis notes that the Ramsey history shows unspecified tenants of the abbey supporting Walter over Daniel.⁴⁹⁹ One of the abbey's tenants was Robert Foliot who served as steward of the Honour of Huntingdon to both David I of Scotland and his son Henry.⁵⁰⁰ Since David was the Empress's uncle and occasional supporter, the argument goes, Walter must be aligned to the Angevin side and opposed to the king. This line of reasoning, although tempting, cannot be proved. To begin with, there is no certainty that Foliot was amongst the tenants of the abbey who so badly desired to keep their sitting abbot. The history names no names, so this assertion cannot stand without further proof. Furthermore, the history was written by a supporter of Walter's who would likely see these local landholders as supporting his man and the author might have sympathetically inflated the degree to which the tenants turned out to lament Walter's abdication. Still more problematic to the argument is the fact that on the occasions in which Robert Foliot shows up in Ramsey records he is not portrayed in a positive light. Prior to Walter's abbacy, Robert Foliot and his brothers Payn and Helias quitclaimed lands apparently taken between Cranfield, Bedfordshire, and Crawley (possibly Husbourne Crawley, Bedfordshire) following the intervention of Henry I, David I, and Roger of Salisbury.⁵⁰¹ Although this transaction does not relate to Walter, it suggests that Foliot was not on the best of terms with the abbey or its leadership. Later, towards the end of Stephen's reign, Archbishop Theobald intervened on more than one occasion on behalf of Ramsey to force Foliot to return the manor of Graveley, Cambridgeshire, which he had unjustly seized.⁵⁰² Here Walter, though unnamed in the charters, and his monks worked together to reclaim their estate from Foliot. Walter's panegyrist includes Graveley amongst the properties that the abbot reclaimed "through many labours and much expense."⁵⁰³ Such an account does not tally with a close relationship between the abbot and Foliot. Admittedly, the final reference to Foliot in Ramsey sources might suggest a more positive relationship between the abbey and Foliot. Abbot William, Walter's successor, increased Foliot's yield of eels from one to two thousand after the "brothers and barons" of the abbey advised him to retain the

⁴⁹⁹ *CAR*, 328.

⁵⁰⁰ *Charters of David I*, ed. Barrow, 19-20; nos. 6 and 63.

⁵⁰¹ *CMR*, 255-256. The same charter is recorded in *CMR* i, 143.

⁵⁰² *CAR*, 306 and 311-312.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 336

homage of this “noble and wise man.”⁵⁰⁴ However, this arrangement was made after William accepted Foliot’s quitclaim of one hundred shillings that was granted to him by Abbot Walter and a letter from the chapter. It seems that gaining Foliot’s service came at a high price for Walter and his church. These records from Ramsey suggest that, based upon the tone of their relationship, Walter and Foliot were unlikely to be so closely associated with each other in the Empress’s cause that Stephen would have cause to desire the abbot’s abdication. If proof is to be found of Walter’s Angevin sympathy, it is not in his relationship with Robert Foliot.

There can be no conclusive argument that Stephen desired Daniel’s elevation to the abbacy purely as a replacement of Walter nor that Walter desired, much less supported, Matilda’s victory over Stephen. However, Daniel’s position as an abbot set up by Stephen remains. Geoffrey de Mandeville may have seen driving out Daniel as a specific act of defiance against the king who had wronged him. But the invasion cannot be portrayed as a particularly pro-Angevin action, and Walter cannot be blamed for causing the invasion by his political actions.

When assessing the culpability of Fenland prelates for the houses’ difficulties different verdicts must be delivered. Nigel can be blamed for both his politics and his actions, whilst Walter’s apparent abstention from national politics is above reproach, his choice to step down was ill timed. In either case a wiser prelate may have spared his house some of the problems it faced, but neither can be found wholly at fault.

Aspects of Normal Prelatial Activity

Divisions Between Prelate and Monks

Two of the chief issues involved in a twelfth-century prelate’s relationship with his monks were their provision through obedientiaries and the division of land between prelate and monks.⁵⁰⁵ Although potentially separate issues, in practice they seem to often coincide. Each of the Fenland houses shows some signs of the division, but they did not display a fully developed system of control of prelatial versus conventual lands and incomes. Peterborough exemplifies the situation, as abbey records show that there was some assigning of resources

⁵⁰⁴ “Quia vero praedictus Robertus vir nobilis erat et sapiens, ex consilio fratrum et baronum ecclesiae retinuumus homagium suum ad servitium ecclesiae tali modo...” Ibid., 276.

⁵⁰⁵ To Knowles, in his landmark study of English monasticism, this division was part of a growing separation between abbot and monks “between the middle of the twelfth century and its end.” Other historians, without perfectly clarifying the topic, built upon Knowles’s study by adding more observations and analysis of the division. This discussion is fleshed out in the Introduction of Everett Crosby’s *Bishop and Chapter*. Knowles, *Monastic Order*, 2nd ed., 300. Crosby, *Bishop and Chapter in Twelfth-Century England A Study of the Mensa Episcopalis* (Cambridge, 1994), 1-9.

to obedientiaries, but a detailed explanation of exactly how it worked is wanting. Edmund King states that “shortly after the Conquest the convent became established as a body separate from the abbot, and a number of [obedientiaries] emerged...”⁵⁰⁶ When discussing the appearance of the sacristy in Peterborough’s records, he notes that an agreement made in 1117 “would seem to imply a firm division between the abbot’s part and the convent’s part at the time.”⁵⁰⁷ It seems that King is assuming a separation between abbot and convent based on the presence of an obedientiary, but this argument cannot stand without further evidence of separation. Because there is little clarity concerning division at the Fenland houses, this chapter will largely refrain from commenting on large-scale divisions of lands between the prelate and his monks. However, Ely proves an exceptional case as more available details show Nigel specifically making provision for the monks. Although Nigel’s record stands out against the other Fenland houses in this area as a result of his charters’ survival, both his actions and those of the abbots fall into the regular and ongoing divisions that occur in the twelfth century.

Nigel’s Division at Ely

At Ely, after its abbot had been replaced by a bishop, there was not an immediate and clear division between the chapter and the prelate.⁵⁰⁸ Edward Miller suggests that the “a stable territorial settlement between bishop and monks may not in fact have been reached much before the early years of Henry II’s reign.”⁵⁰⁹ The tentativeness in Miller’s dating indicates the challenges of chronology in Ely material. In addition, the hostile witness of the *Liber Eliensis*, which is the principle narrative source for the first two bishops, Hervey and Nigel, exacerbates the difficulty in determining the details of the divisions. The *Liber*’s distaste for Nigel calls into question whether or not it would fairly report any good deeds he might have done. When reporting the bishop’s action in setting aside lands for the use of the monks, the *Liber* takes the opportunity to criticize both his actions and his motivations. It claims that Nigel gave less to the monks than they previously held and only made this grant in order to raise his standing in Rome.⁵¹⁰ While this assessment of his division of lands may be accurate, the accompanying criticism of Nigel’s motives would be hard to prove. This report, as well as other commentaries on Nigel and his actions throughout the work, shows that the author of

⁵⁰⁶ King, *Peterborough*, 88.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁵⁰⁸ Miller, *Ely*, 76.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 76; Crosby concurs with this passage. *Bishop and Chapter*, 161.

⁵¹⁰ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 53, p. 299.

the *Liber* deeply disapproved of the bishop. Nevertheless, the *Liber* is useful for its records that make it clear that both Hervey and Nigel separated lands for the monks' use.⁵¹¹

Two explanations lie behind Nigel's charter that set aside land for the monks, one is explicit in the text and the other likely. First, Nigel was reacting to the unraveling of his deputy's treasonous plot and second he was following the example of his predecessor.⁵¹² Early in his episcopal career Nigel left direct oversight of Ely to one Ranulf against whom the *Liber Eliensis* records two complaints. Ranulf domineered over the monks and he plotted to overthrow the kingdom's government.⁵¹³ The *Liber Eliensis* records that after the failure of this conspiracy, a repentant Nigel "restored to the prior and convent control of their possessions."⁵¹⁴ This restoration did not fully please the monks, or at least not the author of the *Liber* who claims that Nigel retained certain good properties for himself. Unfortunately for any attempt to analyze the veracity of this claim, the *Liber* does not record which lands the monks lost to the episcopal holdings. Yet Nigel's action can be compared to that of his predecessor, Hervey. Looking at the grants of both Hervey and Nigel offers some defense of the *Liber's* complaint, but it does not absolutely prove the *Liber's* case. To begin with, even Hervey's own division of lands has an unclear history. The *Liber Eliensis* records one charter of Hervey's that closely resembles Nigel's division.⁵¹⁵ Miller, however, published another charter of Hervey's which he argued was Hervey's true division, and he claimed that the *Liber* charter represents a forgery by the monks.⁵¹⁶ This contention was rejected by E. O. Blake who proposed that Hervey's charter in the *Liber* shows the first bishop's modifications of his original grant in order to satisfy the monks.⁵¹⁷ Crosby, having considered both arguments, agreed with Blake.⁵¹⁸ Karn, however, considers both of Hervey's charters and Nigel's at some length and argues convincingly that Hervey's early charter should be considered his only valid charter.⁵¹⁹ For the purpose of this study I shall set aside Hervey's charter presented in the *Liber Eliensis* as a later forgery. The charter shows the *Liber's* author trying to establish the monks' long history of holding certain lands, but it cannot explain what Hervey actually granted.

⁵¹¹ Karn has edited three such charters although the first is not in the *Liber Eliensis*.

⁵¹² *LE* ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 53 p. 299.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 51-52, pp. 294-299.

⁵¹⁴ "priori et conventui rerum suarum potestatem ... restituit" *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 53, p. 299.

⁵¹⁵ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 26, pp. 262-263. Also found and discussed in *EEA* 31, no. 6.

⁵¹⁶ Miller, *Ely*, 75-76 and 282-283.

⁵¹⁷ *LE*, ed. Blake, pp. 1-1i.

⁵¹⁸ Crosby, *Bishop and Chapter*, 161-162.

⁵¹⁹ *EEA* 31, ed. Karn, nos. 3 and 6.

The two genuine charters present Nigel to his disadvantage. Comparing Hervey's first charter and Nigel's shows some twenty-seven listings to be identical. Hervey's charter includes a further seventeen holdings, whilst Nigel's only lists twelve more. A crude analysis based on Domesday suggests that from the holdings that differ, Hervey's division gave some £60 while Nigel's only amounted to £43. If the complaint that the *Liber* makes is based on this difference, the monks' complaint has legitimacy and Nigel's supposed move towards better internal affairs did indeed amount to little. The *Liber* argues this case in general and states that Nigel's goal in sending this new division to Pope Innocent II for approval was simply to make a name for himself in papal circles.⁵²⁰ Perhaps there is some truth in this. In late 1138, Innocent replied to Nigel's request for confirmation with two charters confirming the rights in general of the church of Ely and more specifically the properties which Nigel had set aside for the monks' use.⁵²¹ However, Nigel may have simply been following standard procedure to secure confirmation with no inappropriate hope of praise. All that can be absolutely sure without discovery of evidence of his state of mind is that Nigel made a division and obtained papal support for it in April 1139.⁵²²

There was, however, one clear benefit that accrued to the monks of Ely from Nigel's action: they did not lose their holdings when their prelate lost his. After Nigel's rebellion in late 1139, Stephen's seizure of Ely threatened to deprive the monks of their lands. They approached the king and after protesting their loyalty and begging his favor they obtained a royal charter upholding their property rights.⁵²³ Stephen informed his earls, barons, and other servants that "he was granting to the monks of Ely all their possessions and holdings wherever they hold them."⁵²⁴ On the other hand he deprived Nigel of all his episcopal holdings and income.⁵²⁵ Had Nigel not divided the lands between the monks and himself, it would have been difficult to prove which lands should be sequestered as holdings of the rebel bishop and which should be released to the monks. As a result, the monks could have been subjected to a royally appointed administrator. As it happened, the *Liber* does not specify whether Stephen's charter's implementation followed the division that Nigel had

⁵²⁰ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 53, p. 299.

⁵²¹ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 55-56, pp. 301-305. This confirmation seems to be based directly upon Nigel's division. Although the division suggests damage on Nigel's part – there may be more to the story. Karn notes that it seems that this division was early in Hervey's career and that he may have later added to the monks' lands. If this is the case, then Nigel's division may be even less generous than it seems. Karn, *EEA* 31, pp. 7-8.

⁵²² *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 56, pp. 302-305.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 63, p. 315; *RRAN* iii, no. 262.

⁵²⁴ "Concedo monachis de Ely omnes res et tenuras suas, ubicumque eas habent." *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 63, p. 315; *RRAN* iii, no. 262.

⁵²⁵ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 64, pp. 315-316.

promulgated, but it does show the benefit to the monks of Nigel having reestablished a separation of some sort.

Nigel altered the post-Ranulf division at least once. Late in his career, probably in the mid-1150s, Nigel added to the monks' part with the grant of Winston, Suffolk, a holding that was worth £4 20s. in Domesday.⁵²⁶ Nigel's gift of this land to his "beloved brothers" was not the first time that it had been donated to the monks' part. Hervey's division charter had assigned the manor to the monks' food.⁵²⁷ Neither the *Liber* nor any extant acta explain Nigel's decisions first to assign Winston to the bishop's portion, or later to give it to the monks. Since the eventual transfer of Winston occurred at some point either late in Stephen's reign or early in Henry's, it may be that Nigel was attempting to right wrongs that the monks' claimed against him and that he finally felt able to be generous with the probability of his political fortunes rising again. Nigel's reasoning, however, is unprovable. The certain fact of the case is that Nigel expanded the priory's holdings at the expense of the bishop's portion by reversing an earlier action he had taken.

In this discussion of division, Nigel is shown exercising a standard role of a twelfth-century prelate, dividing lands to his chapter. Some of the details of the history were not standard. For example, Ely was the only abbey transformed into a bishopric between the Conquest and the Reformation. Not every monastic cathedral suffered multiple invasions during one prelacy. On the other hand, the benefits of separating episcopal lands from those of the chapter were widely recognized. Whether or not it was his prime objective, Nigel's decision to follow what was becoming a norm and divide the lands proved helpful to the monks of Ely.

Grants to the Obedientiaries

Aside from Nigel none of the prelates left clear division charters. However, this lack does not suggest that they did not take steps to see to their monks' concerns. All the Fenland prelates made some provision for the obedientiaries of their houses.

In Ely, Nigel made a number of gifts to obedientiaries, but they are rarely straightforward. For example, Nigel took other opportunities to enhance the chapter's endowment at the bishop's expense. In order to fund the making and repair of books, he assigned the following revenue sources to the precentor: the church of Impington, Cambridgeshire, with its tithes, a church with its tithes at Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire, two

⁵²⁶ *EEA* 31, no. 41; Suffolk 383r., Phillimore, 21.28.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 3.

parts of the tithes of Pampisford, Cambridgeshire, and unspecified land given by Ailwin of Huntingdon when his son became a monk of Ely⁵²⁸ Unfortunately Nigel's charter is not extant and must be extrapolated from a confirmation granted by Prior William which means that this donation cannot be dated more closely than his time as prior, 1134-1144.⁵²⁹ However, Nigel repeated and clarified this early donation in the last decade of his episcopate with another, extant, charter.⁵³⁰ This act changes the recipient from a specific precentor, Aluric, to the *scriptorium*. It repeats the churches and tithe information, notes that 2s.2d. come from the land of Ailwin, and adds a *mansuram* of land with a house in Ely. The estates from which Nigel granted churches and tithes had a long connection to Ely. In Domesday, Impington, Pampisford, and Whittlesey were held by Ely. In Pampisford the abbot held lands worth £7, Impington was "in the lordship of the church of Ely" and Whittlesey "was always in secure lordship in the church of Ely"; however, the language of Domesday is not precise enough to tie the lands to the abbey's provision or the abbot's.⁵³¹ After 1086 Impington and Pampisford must have been lost since they were both amongst the properties reclaimed by Nigel at Wandlebury.⁵³² None of these sources of revenue had been granted to the monks in Nigel's earlier division, suggesting that the bishop continued to take a role in directing Ely's resources to specific needs. The lack of clarity in dating William the Prior's confirmation and the absence of Nigel's original charter make it a matter of conjecture as to whether this occurred before the arrest of the bishop or at some later point. It seems plausible that Nigel directed this action during the period between sending to Rome for papal confirmation of his division and his family's political downfall, but this suggestion is merely speculation. This grant is one of the times when Nigel's action has no clearly discernible motivation aside from a presumed desire to help his house.

In a case that is somewhat hard to classify as a donation to the monks or simply as a repayment, Nigel granted the valuable manor of Hadstock, Essex, to benefit "the shrine of St Aethelthryth and the altar."⁵³³ The *Liber* assigns a base motivation of financial necessity to Nigel, but his charter proposes more lofty aims. The *Liber* records two accounts of Nigel's donation. Both stem from his troubles during Stephen's reign and they may well fit together

⁵²⁸ *EEA* 31, no. 32. Ely's church at Whittlesey was St Andrews; St Mary's belonging to Thorney's manor in Whittlesey. *VCH Cambridgeshire*, iv, 128-129.

⁵²⁹ *EEA* 31, no. 32, pp. 53-54. The prior's charter explicitly notes Bishop Nigel's "cartam."

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 44. Karn suggests that "the death or retirement" of Aluric may have occasioned Nigel's second charter. *Ibid.*, no. 53, p. 53.

⁵³¹ *Cambridgeshire*, 191r-v., Phillimore, 5.18, 41, and 44.

⁵³² *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch 48, p. 287.

⁵³³ "Feretri sancte Ætheldrethe et altaris." *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 90, p. 336; *EEA* 31, no. 35.

as one account more clearly than the *Liber*'s narration. In the first mention of the donation, the *Liber* states that after the bishop's treasures were stolen at Wareham and before travelling to Rome, Nigel convinced the monks to permit him some of the church's treasures and silver in exchange for repayment and the estate of Hadstock.⁵³⁴ The second account states that upon returning from Rome after Geoffrey de Mandeville's rebellion Nigel needed ready cash to purchase Stephen's favor.⁵³⁵ He met this exigency by taking money and treasures from the shrine of St Aethelthryth.⁵³⁶ In order to persuade the monks to permit this act, Nigel gathered ten men to offer surety and he donated Hadstock to the monks.⁵³⁷ It may be that the pre-Rome borrowing was only accompanied by the promise of the manor and that post-Rome Nigel's additional need forced him to actually grant the land. Karn dates the donation charter to 1144 x 1145 "at the time that the transaction that necessitated it was made."⁵³⁸ Although Karn may be ignoring the first time the *Liber* shows Nigel promising the manor to the monks, Archbishop Theobald's earlier confirmation of the grant is also datable no earlier than 1144.⁵³⁹ This dating suggests that whenever Nigel may have promised the land, he likely did not grant it until after returning from Rome. In contrast to the account in the *Liber Eliensis*, the bishop's own charter appeals to his duty and love of the church as motivations and makes no mention of any immediate financial relief for himself. According to the charter, Nigel was merely a responsible prelate who was seeing to the duties of his house. Notwithstanding these pious professions, it seems likely that Nigel's donation was inspired more by the necessity of raising funds to regain Stephen's favor than by a simple concern for the church's treasury. The resulting transfer of Hadstock to the monks' portion perhaps outweighed the cash value of the many treasures disposed of by Nigel. Although it lay fairly far from Ely and even if it could not restore the lost goods, the donation would certainly strengthen the finances of St Aethelthryth's shrine and so demonstrate Nigel doing his part as a helpful bishop.

Nigel made other grants to benefit specific obedientiaries. At some point between 1150 and 1158, he donated service worth an annual sixpence to the altar of St Aethelthryth: Nigel specified that the money should be given to the sacrist.⁵⁴⁰ This gift comes after the worst of the Anarchy and it may easily be from the first years of Henry II's reign. Consequently, Nigel would have been better placed to make this donation since he was no

⁵³⁴ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 78, pp. 324-326.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 86, pp. 332-333 and ch. 89, pp. 334-335.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 89, pp. 334-335.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 89-90 pp. 334-337; *EEA* 31, no. 35.

⁵³⁸ *EEA* 31, no. 35, p. 57.

⁵³⁹ Saltman, *Theobald*, no. 98.

⁵⁴⁰ *EEA* 31, no. 37. "Reddendo singulis annis inde sacriste de Ely..."

longer in conflict with the king. The gift may have been an attempt by Nigel to redress his use of the church's resources on his own behalf, but the charter's wording itself has no suggestion of any rationale for the donation. This seems to be quite a small grant, but it shows Nigel benefitting the cathedral church and sacristy and, unlike in other cases, there is no specific reason to question the bishop's motivation in making the gift.

Nigel also interacted with the infirmary in a charter datable only to 1133 x 1158.⁵⁴¹ In it he assigns several lands elsewhere granted to the priory specifically to the infirmary. Karn suggests that one of the properties listed, Chettisham, may have been newly assarted after Domesday and thus would have been a "recently acquired property." Although it is possible that the bishop was showing a hitherto suppressed streak of generosity, it is perhaps more plausible that the land had been assigned to the priory in some other grant, and that – along with other properties in the charter which we know to have already pertained to the priory – Chettisham was merely being assigned to a specific use.

Moving on the second richest and perhaps the most troubled of the Fenland houses, Ramsey has little record of obedientiaries during Stephen's reign. Only two of more than thirty charters of Abbot Walter direct resources to specific obedientiaries. They suggest that the abbot had some concern for specific work of the monastery and practicing pastoral care toward his monks, yet there is no special focus on this aspect of the monastery's mission.

The first gift was fairly minor. At some point during his abbacy, Walter granted the church of Cranfield, Bedfordshire, to a priest named Geoffrey.⁵⁴² The manor and advowson seem to have been unchallenged properties of Ramsey. In any case, the life grant of the church called for a rent of twenty shillings a year "which same [payment] Walter will give to the library for the repair of the books of the church."⁵⁴³ Since the living would not extend past Geoffrey's incumbency, this benefit to the library was apparently limited to the duration of the recipient's life. Nevertheless, it indicates that Walter attempted to address, at least in this small way, a specific need of the abbey.

Walter made a more permanent, although less immediate, gift to the almonry. At some point between 1148 and 1160, Walter issued a charter stating that "by the unanimous wish and agreement of all our brothers we granted to the almonry the church of Warboys

⁵⁴¹ *EEA* 31, no. 38.

⁵⁴² *CMR* i, 152; *CAR*, 272. The name is recorded as "Gaufrido" and thus the VCH is incorrect in "Godfrey." *VCH Bedfordshire*, iii, 278.

⁵⁴³ "Idem Walterus donavit Armario ad reparationem librorum ecclesiae." *CMR* i, 152; *CAR*, 272.

[Huntingdonshire] with its free lands and tithes and all its pertinences.”⁵⁴⁴ Walter’s charter mentions a confirmation by Robert, bishop of Lincoln, which further elucidates the donation.⁵⁴⁵ Robert actually issued two charters, both of which can be dated only as loosely as Walter’s.⁵⁴⁶ The key charter notes that the almonry would not immediately gain possession of the church but that Nicholas de Sigillo, then a royal clerk, would remain in possession unless he becomes a bishop or a monk.⁵⁴⁷ In addition, when Nicholas vacated the living, Richard, clerk of Warboys, was to gain possession for the duration of his life. This delay in possession for the almonry is mitigated by the annual payment of two gold coins at Michaelmas from the person who held the church. This grant of Walter’s merits a few conclusions. As bad as Geoffrey de Mandeville’s occupation of Ramsey had been, the abbey had recovered enough that it could afford to set aside a source of income for a key task of their church. The donation also aligns with the description of Walter’s concern for charity for the poor mentioned in the *Narratio*. When after the abbey had regained some prosperity “such great charity burned in him that he appointed to be tithed to the uses of the poor not only loaves for the [communal] oven but also all his own pennies.”⁵⁴⁸ Perhaps a further question is what significance lies with Nicholas de Sigillo’s possession of a church whose advowson lay with Ramsey. There is no record of his having received the church, and Walter’s charter does not mention him. Based on John of Salisbury’s opinion of Nicholas’ virtue, it seems unlikely that he would have obtained the church through improper means, and it must be concluded that the abbey had freely granted him the living and that Walter in this charter was merely looking towards the future when a valuable living would be free to assign. Despite the delay for the almonry in gaining possession, Walter’s gift was of long-term value to the abbey and remained with it until the Dissolution.⁵⁴⁹

The case of Peterborough, the third richest of the houses studied, differs somewhat from that of Ramsey as some establishment of the obedientiaries there predated Abbot Martin.⁵⁵⁰ Despite the abbot already having shared the house’s income, Martin offered additional support. The abbot granted one charter assigning revenue to the sacristy – no other

⁵⁴⁴ “Omnium fratrum nostrorum voto unanimes et consensu, ecclesiam de Wardeboys, cum terris liberis, et decimis, et omnibus pertinentiis suis, eidem Elemosinario concessimus.” *CMR* ii, 174; *CAR*, 303.

⁵⁴⁵ *CAR*, 301-302.

⁵⁴⁶ *EEA* I, nos. 226-227.

⁵⁴⁷ C. L. Kingsford, “Sigillo, Nicholas de (*fl.* 1156-c. 1187),” rev. John Hudson, *ODNB* (2004)

[<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref.odnb/25540>, accessed 20 November 2018], 1.

⁵⁴⁸ Tanta vero in eo fervebat caritas, ut non solum panes ad furnum sed etiam omnes denarios suos ad usus pauperum faceret decimari. *CAR*, 335.

⁵⁴⁹ *VCH Huntingdonshire*, ii, 246.

⁵⁵⁰ Edmund King, “The Endowment of the Obedientiaries,” in *Peterborough*. 88-98.

obedientary is specifically listed – separating the enumerated sources of income between those that “had been set up originally” and “those that I, Abbot Martin, added beyond those.”⁵⁵¹ While the first list of the earlier division is of chapels, churches, and tithes from many of the knights of the house, Martin’s donations are slightly more eclectic. He gave the entire vill of Pilsgate, Northamptonshire (now Cambridgeshire), with the church of Caster and all that pertained to it; various other lands and the services of seven individuals; and a few other revenue sources. As in the case of Nigel’s gift of Hadstock, more than simple charity seems to have been behind Martin’s grant of Pilsgate. Hugh Candidus said that it was a repayment for removing treasures early in his abbacy. Beyond this matter, the biggest question is that of dating Martin’s grant. Two facts would seem to settle the matter. One property Martin added was the land of Alward of Burch, a donation that would seem to be fairly closely dated on both ends. The gift cannot have been made before 1144 because that is when the transaction that secured Alward’s land took place.⁵⁵² At the other end, Martin traveled to Rome for a confirmation of this entire donation and he received one in late 1146 from Pope Eugenius III.⁵⁵³ Thus the dating should be 1144 x 1145. However, despite the clear event markers on both ends, Martin’s charter itself complicates the dating as it reads that it was granted “with the advice and consent and testimony of the chapter and the granting of the court and the barons of the church and with the confirmation of King Henry and his charter.”⁵⁵⁴ This statement is problematic as the dating listed above would seem to indicate that Martin’s action took place squarely in the middle of Stephen’s reign; furthermore, there seems to be no extant charter from either Henry I or Henry II that lists out the lands in alignment with this charter. However, this could be resolved by four explanations. The abbey could have substituted Stephen’s name for Henry’s when copying the charter, but this seems unlikely. Alternatively, the charter could be referring to a lost charter of Henry I which confirmed the abbey’s possessions when Martin became abbot or soon thereafter. While such a charter would not convert the new grants to the sacrist, it would stand for the older grants and particularly for the knights’ lands. A third option is that it may be based upon a confirmation of Henry II, but this seems highly unlikely. While Henry landed in England on 8 December 1154 and was crowned 19 December, Martin became ill on 23 December 1154 and died 2 January. Hugh Candidus does not mention Martin attending the coronation.

⁵⁵¹ “Haec sunt que primitus ... stabilita fuerunt” and “haec sunt quae ego Abbas Martinus hiis super addidi.” *Swaffham*, 100r.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 114v-115r.

⁵⁵³ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 116-119.

⁵⁵⁴ “Consilio et assensu atque testimonio capituli atque curie et baronum ecclesiae concessu et regis Henrici et confirmatione cartae suae.” *Swaffham*, 99v.

Finally, Martin's grant recorded in Swaffham may instead refer to a later grant of Henry II which declared that Peterborough should hold all its lands as in the days of Henry I and specifically that the knights and men of the honour fulfill their duties.⁵⁵⁵ But although this would explain the mention of "Henry" it seems improbable. Without further evidence, the most likely case seems to be that Martin's charter is based upon a lost confirmation of Henry I. Although the charter's dating is tricky and his largest new donation had its origins in his misuse of abbey goods, this charter points towards Martin's concern for the well-being of his abbey's sacristy, something in keeping with his reputation as relayed by Hugh Candidus.

Beyond this charter evidence, Martin of Bec also received a positive report from his historian concerning his care for the obedientiaries. Hugh Candidus notes that Martin worked diligently in adverse circumstances to benefit the obedientiaries.⁵⁵⁶ Unfortunately this general statement, although positive, does not provide specific details on the division of goods. However, slightly later Martin is recorded as "assigning" the vill of Pilsgate with its many revenue sources to the sacristy for restoring lost treasure and building the church.⁵⁵⁷ This claim is supported by Martin's charter. Hugh's chronicle also notes that Martin planned, if he lived long enough, to add to the cellarer and the chamberlain and secure papal confirmations.⁵⁵⁸ It also notes that Martin confirmed two manors, Collingham, Nottinghamshire, and Fiskerton, Lincolnshire, for clothing the monks, although this assignment was not new to him.⁵⁵⁹ This effusive source for Martin's prelacy states that the years of Stephen's reign, although highly troubled, were not able to prevent an abbot from fulfilling his duties, although the specifics of how Martin helped the monks financially are not clearly spelled out. But Hugh repeatedly claims that Martin did a good job of leading his house in all the necessary ways.

Likewise, at Thorney Abbot Robert is twice recorded taking action to benefit obedientiaries. Both records presuppose the existence of the named offices. The first, datable only between 1133 and 1151, records that Robert "respectfully maintained all the abovementioned concessions of his predecessor Lord Gunter and added very much to them."⁵⁶⁰ Without explaining if Robert achieved this addition by increasing lands, tithes, or

⁵⁵⁵ *Swaffham*, 99v-100r; *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2038. "et volo et firmiter precipio quod milites et ceteri eiusdem honoris homines abbati intendant et seruicia ei ut domino suo ita bene et plene faciant sicut predecessoris suis abbatibus Burgi melius et plenius facere solebant tempore H(enrici) regis aui mei."

⁵⁵⁶ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 105.

⁵⁵⁷ "Constituit." *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

⁵⁵⁹ King notes the division in an 1125 survey and suggests that it may date to Domesday. *Peterborough*, 91.

⁵⁶⁰ "Robertus Abbas Thorn omnes superdictas concessiones domini Gunterii predecessoris sui Honorifice tenuit & plurimas auxit." *RB Thorney* ii, 416r.

other revenue sources, the charter goes on to discuss Robert's grant of twenty shillings to the infirmary.⁵⁶¹ This, it explains, he sourced from the rent of the mill in Water Newton, Huntingdonshire. Thorney had held that manor since before the Conquest.⁵⁶² This charter was issued after the dedication of the infirmary's chapel by Nigel, a connection that not only helps to date the document but also shows Nigel fulfilling episcopal business outside of Ely. There seems to be no further comment on Thorney's use of these tithes to help fund its infirmary.

The second record of Robert's support for the obedientiaries comes after his death in 1151 and opens referring to "Abbot Robert of pious memory."⁵⁶³ In it, Robert is recorded as having donated money to the sacrist from the rent of land that he recovered from Robert of Yaxley. He granted the tithes of seven priests for the "purchasing of ornaments."⁵⁶⁴ He granted wax for candles. To the librarian Robert granted the land and houses in Huntingdon granted by one Henry for his son's entrance to Thorney already mentioned in Chapter 1, but the abbot also gave the rent of an unspecified church and land of Albert of Huntingdon who does not appear in the *Red Book's* section on Huntingdon.⁵⁶⁵ Finally, Abbot Robert gave sources of income for the infirmary and the almonry. This donation must have amounted to a substantial figure. The charter underlines its validity by noting that "He gave these donations, being of a well and sound mind, that he might be a cheerful giver."⁵⁶⁶ Furthermore, all the chapter agreed to the division. This division by Robert shows how an abbot might use his means to promote a healthy obedientiary system.

In concluding this look at prelatial donations to obedientiaries, we return to Ely for a more in-depth case study that exemplifies how a charter that appears to be a straightforward donation or slightly obscured confirmation can be part of a much bigger story of prelatial familiars. Late in his career, sometime between 1158-1169, Nigel issued a grant to the monks of the tithes of William Peregrinus of Catmere, Littlebury, Essex, for the repair of the organs.⁵⁶⁷ The vill of Littlebury clearly belonged to the abbey in Domesday.⁵⁶⁸ At some point before Nigel's charter, witnessed by Solomon the Prior, the previous prior, Alexander, had

⁵⁶¹ *RB Thorney* ii, 416r.

⁵⁶² Huntingdonshire, Phillimore 7.5; 205r.

⁵⁶³ *RB Thorney* ii, 416v-417r.

⁵⁶⁴ "Ad emptionem ornamentorum." *Ibid.*, 416v.

⁵⁶⁵ *RB Thorney* i, 41r.-42r.

⁵⁶⁶ "Has donationes ipse sanus & incolumis ut hilaris dator dedit," *RB Thorney* ii, 417r. This language echoes II Corinthians 9.7.

⁵⁶⁷ *EEA* 31, no. 43.

⁵⁶⁸ The village of 25 hides was worth £20. Essex, 19r.-v., Phillimore, 10.5.

granted what seems to be the same tithes to one Edmund the priest for 5s a year.⁵⁶⁹ This donation was of tithes of the land of Henry Pelerin or Peregrinus, but they were also allocated for the repair of the church's organs. Therefore it seems that in his charter Nigel was merely reestablishing a previous arrangement that benefitted the monks. Nigel and the prior's charters together show that Henry Peregrinus was followed by William, plausibly his son. Looking further into Ely's records there is more to the story of the Peregrinus family.

During the abbacy of Simeon, 1081-1093, the *Liber Eliensis* presents one William Peregrinus as useful man to deal with lawsuits.⁵⁷⁰ The *Liber* also shows him to be an unscrupulous opportunist who, having received kind treatment from Simeon, took advantage of the abbot as he grew old and wrongfully took possession of land in Witcham, Cambridgeshire.⁵⁷¹ Miller proposes that this William was also the first tenant of Littlebury.⁵⁷² William Peregrinus might have been called that simply because he had been on a pilgrimage. There may be no familial connection with the Peregrinus family associated with the episcopacy and Littlebury during the twelfth century. On the other hand this first William could have been the father of Nigel's associate Henry whose successor was also named William.⁵⁷³ Both the first William and Henry were involved in advising the prelate of Ely during their lifetimes, a vocation that may have been inherited and the younger William may have received a name passed from his grandfather.

After Simeon's abbacy, the next time a *Peregrinus* appears in Ely sources is during Ranulf's plotting. One Henry Peregrinus is listed amongst his closest associates.⁵⁷⁴ Their alliance did not work out: Ranulf fled and Henry is not mentioned in the aftermath, although the *Liber* notes that "certain of the laity were hanged from the gibbet [and] clerks suffered the condemnation of perpetual exile."⁵⁷⁵ Apparently, Henry escaped punishment. When Nigel journeyed to Rome a Henry Peregrinus was amongst his companions and should be considered to be a member of his household.⁵⁷⁶ The *Liber* has nothing but disparagement for

⁵⁶⁹ *EEA* 31, no. 43, p. 68.

⁵⁷⁰ *Quem antea de imo extulit abbas, ut causas villicorum de exterius ad illum deportaret. Hic multiplici verborum astutia expertus, quorundam necessitates fovere, quorundam vero prepedire nitebatur.* *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. II, ch. 135, p. 219.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, bk. II, ch. 135, p. 219.

⁵⁷² Miller, *Ely*, 171 fn.

⁵⁷³ Karn assumes this family link to be the case although he does not make clear the link between William I Peregrinus and Henry. *EEA* 31, no. 81, p. 111.

⁵⁷⁴ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 52, pp. 297. Henry Peregrinus also appears as a benefactor of Thorney who granted them assorted and difficult to locate fisheries. Thorney gained Nigel's charter confirming this donation. *RB Thorney* i, 171v; II, 374r; *EEA* 31, no. 81.

⁵⁷⁵ "Laicorum quidam in patibulo suspenduntur, clerici perpetui dampnationem exilii patiuntur." *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 52, p. 298.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 78, p. 325, fn 8.

Nigel's select band, presumably because they encouraged his abstraction of church treasures as a means of funding his journey.⁵⁷⁷ Henry Peregrinus next reappears in the *Liber* as a guarantor of fifteen marks of the loan Nigel extracted from the monks in order to buy Stephen's favour.⁵⁷⁸ The *Liber* mentions Henry a final time in its account of the woeful end of those men who were "enemies of [God's] beloved virgin Aethelthryth."⁵⁷⁹ He died after living for three years "afflicted in the midst of his body."⁵⁸⁰ This dire end must have taken place after 1153-1158 when he witnessed a charter confirming William Monachus of Shelford's grant to St Radegund's.⁵⁸¹ Taking all these facts together, it seems plausible that William I Peregrinus gained Littlebury during the time of Abbot Simeon, that Henry his descendent granted the tithes of Catmere to the church, and that, in this charter, Nigel was reaffirming the tithes' designation as funding for the upkeep of the organs.⁵⁸²

The Peregrinus family continued in its association with Ely. William Peregrinus and his brother Michael witness a charter of Nigel's from 1155 x 1158. Michael can perhaps be identified with the Michael son of Henry "Pilrun" who witnessed the prior's Catmere charter.⁵⁸³ A Michael Peregrinus also witnessed a charter of Nigel's likely dating to the very end of the bishop's life.⁵⁸⁴ In his *carta* of 1166, Nigel records that in Essex William Peregrinus owes one knight of the old enfeoffment.⁵⁸⁵ Men with the family name "Peregrinus" continue to appear in Ely records after Nigel's prelacy.⁵⁸⁶ Although the connections between all these different men denoted "Peregrinus" is not perfectly clear from the charters and *Liber Eliensis*, it seems reasonable that a landholding family represented in the 1166 *carta* would persist for several generations and continue to witness episcopal acts.

This discussion of the Peregrinus family illustrates a key aspect of Nigel's career as bishop of Ely. Although his actions were often represented as evil choices by the author of the *Liber Eliensis*, the consequences were complex. His favoring of Henry Peregrinus appears to have established a long-lasting family of tenants in Ely's estate of Littlebury in Essex. The Peregrinus family made at least one donation to the monks, and that gift remained

⁵⁷⁷ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 78, pp. 324-326.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 86, pp. 332-333 and ch. 89, p. 335.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 138, pp. 385-386.

⁵⁸⁰ "Henricus Peregrinus, media corporis parte depressus, satis exitialiter per tres vixit annos." *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 138, p. 386. He also made a donation to Thorney before his death; Nigel issued the notification. *EEA* 31, no. 81.

⁵⁸¹ *EEA* 31, no. 20. William Monachus of Shelford appeared alongside Henry Peregrinus as Nigel's travel companion and loan guarantor.

⁵⁸² *EEA* 31, no. 43.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁵⁸⁴ *EEA* 42, App. 4, no. 1.

⁵⁸⁵ *EEA* 31, no. 59.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 127; *EEA* 42, nos. 51 and 130-131.

with the house some thirty years later, being confirmed by Nigel's son and London's bishop, Richard fitz Nigel.⁵⁸⁷ Whilst Nigel's political machinations both nationally and locally may have displeased the monks of Ely, the results were not altogether bad if they helped establish loyal tenants for Ely.

In concluding this section several themes can be seen. All the prelates, as was fitting, made grants to the monks of their houses. The amount of the donations does not correspond to each house's Domesday valuation. Nigel gave relatively little. While his grant of church tithes from Impington and Whittlesey as well as other grants may have helped the monks' library, the gift of an annual sixpence to the sacrist seems close to negligible. On the other hand, Robert, head of the poorest of these four houses, gave a long list of grants to his monks. Martin's gifts were more praised than recorded, and Walter's grant was of little immediate value although it benefitted the almonry for centuries later. The paucity of evidence for division between the prelates and their monks makes any argument that the prelates neglected their monks impossible to prove. Certainly the house records view the three abbots as showing concern for their monks, whilst Nigel seems less involved in ameliorating the situation of the monks of Ely. As might be expected, donations were made towards the end of Stephen's reign, after the worst fighting in the Fens had subsided. All in all the donations show the houses making slow progress towards greater financial well-being.

Nigel's Confirmation of Grants to Ely

Another category of charters further demonstrates the normal business of a bishop, even during Stephen's reign. In these charters confirming grants to the chapter, Nigel acted as lord of episcopal lands and not particularly as prelate of the monks. Although this type of record is unique amongst the four prelates discussed, it is a notable part of his regular relationship with the monks of Ely. It is worth considering because Nigel's actions afforded him opportunity to interact with the monks of Ely in a different capacity.

One example of Nigel acting as lord occurs in a fairly prosaic charter granting to the monks of Ely land donated by one Ingelram, a priest, upon his becoming a monk.⁵⁸⁸ This donation elicited Nigel's charter because it lay in Colne, Huntingdonshire, a manor held by the bishop.⁵⁸⁹ Nigel emphasizes his position as lord of the manor by noting that the grant

⁵⁸⁷ *EEA 26: London 1189-1228*, ed., D. P. Johnson (Oxford, 2003), App. 4, no. 1.

⁵⁸⁸ *EEA 31*, no. 33.

⁵⁸⁹ *Huntingdonshire 204r.*, Phillimore, 4:1; *VCH Huntingdonshire*, ii, 167-171.

“preserves my right and all my customs.”⁵⁹⁰ This charter, although showing Nigel at work, cannot really speak to how well he fulfilled his duties during any specific time during Stephen’s reign because it can only be dated from 1133-1150. A similar donation is that of Wigar the priest who, at the end of his life, gave Ely two acres and a rod of land and three rods of meadow in Stretham.⁵⁹¹ The lordship of this land was held by the bishop, and thus, Nigel had to confirm the grant.⁵⁹² In a slightly different limitation than that confirming Ingelram’s donation, Nigel noted that the church and monks held the land freely “except for the service pertaining to the hundred.”⁵⁹³ The dating of this charter cannot be closer specified than Nigel’s episcopate, but Karn argues that the witnesses suggest a late date.

In addition, three other charters can be more firmly dated towards the end of Nigel’s time in office and show him continuing this practice of confirming grants. Two specifically pertain to his role as lord. In the first, Nigel approved the donation by his tenant Hubert of Ditton of half a silver mark per annum to the infirmary from himself and his successors in perpetuity.⁵⁹⁴ The annual gift came from land that Hubert held in Horningsea and Fen Ditton, two parts of one Domesday manor northeast of Cambridge.⁵⁹⁵ Hubert’s grant most likely occurred during the 1150s or 1160s. It followed Nigel’s non-extant grant of the land in question to Hubert, most likely during the 1150s.⁵⁹⁶ Nigel’s grant is known through the prior’s confirmation that notes that Hubert was the “nepos” of the former tenant, Gilbert the chaplain.⁵⁹⁷ Karn reasonably proposes that Hubert inherited the land. In the second case, sometime during or after 1158, Nigel confirmed a grant by one William of Stapleford of land in Little Hadham, Hertfordshire, to the monks.⁵⁹⁸ Hadham itself was among the manors that Nigel had retained in the bishop’s holdings, although Hervey had earlier granted it to the monks.⁵⁹⁹ The donor, William, left an unspecified amount of land to the monks in his will although his heirs were to retain the tenancy and pay the monks five shillings a year.⁶⁰⁰ It is hard to see Nigel showing any particular care for the monks in this pair of transactions; he simply agreed to a donation by his tenant. Nigel did his job and did not exceed it.

⁵⁹⁰ “Salvo iure meo et omnibus consuetudinibus meis.” *EEA* 31 no. 33.

⁵⁹¹ *EEA* 31, no. 47.

⁵⁹² *VCH Cambridgeshire*, iv, 151-159.

⁵⁹³ *EEA* 31, no. 47 “salvo servitio quod ad hundredum pertinet.”

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 45.

⁵⁹⁵ Both were included as Horningsea. *VCH Cambridgeshire*, x, 123.

⁵⁹⁶ Nigel’s charter is not extant but that of Alexander, Prior of Ely relates this grant. *EEA* 31, no. 62.

Alexander’s dates in office are imprecise but most likely c.1150-1158. *EEA*, 31 p. 247.

⁵⁹⁷ *EEA* 31, no. 62.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 48.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 3 and 31. Hervey had reclaimed the manor from Ranulf Flambard by Henry I’s charter of 1110.

RRAN ii, no. 945.

⁶⁰⁰ “Willelmus ... in testamento suo donavit ...” *EEA* 31, no. 48.

The other late confirmation by Nigel was of donations by Robert, chamberlain to the Earl of Richmond, and Aubrey Picot, which helped the cell in Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire.⁶⁰¹ This act, discussed in chapter four of this thesis, confirmed grants of the isles of Denny and Elmney, churches of Wilbraham and Wendy, as well as other small sources of income to monks of Ely who, under the leadership of a certain Reginald, were established at a church dedicated to Saints James and Leonard on the small isles in Waterbeach. In this case, Nigel seems to be confirming grants that benefitted the monks of Ely as the diocesan rather than the lord of the land in question.⁶⁰²

The cases of Nigel as Bishop of Ely confirming lands donated to his monks help to broaden the picture of his episcopacy. His relationship with the monks was businesslike. In one case, Nigel particularly notes that the donation excepts “his service.”⁶⁰³ This simply follows a lord’s concern for his rights. In these interactions with the convent he might have taken the opportunity to show particular concern for the monks of his house, but he did not. He does refer to them as “our monks” in one case and notes his fatherly position in another.⁶⁰⁴ But despite these promising signs of affection, Nigel is not seen adding to the donations. These records suggest that he was competent in his business. If he ought to issue a charter benefitting the monks at no particular cost to himself, it happened. This attitude, if applied consistently, would have pleased the monks of Ely who expected little more from a bishop than to be helped when necessary and left alone when his presence was not needed. This would constitute a perfectly acceptable working relationship.

Acceptable Alienation of Lands and Churches

In addition to dividing sources of revenue between the monks and himself, the task of overseeing his house’s lands was amongst the standard duties of a prelate. The general canonical rule was that a prelate should not alienate lands from his house. Nevertheless, many abbots and bishops did alienate lands. Sometimes this was merely the granting of a life tenancy, in other cases the grant was more open-ended. While either type of loss seems likely to displease the monks, they approved of grants not infrequently. Although not as serious a problem as losing lands from a house’s ultimate tenancy, lands removed from demesne were likely to produce less revenue than demesne lands. However, establishing a legal record that

⁶⁰¹ Nigel’s confirmation is edited in *Ibid.*, no. 42; The *Liber Eliensis* recounts the donation in Book III, chapters 138-142; and further discussion of the cell’s fate can be read in Henry II’s charter to Geoffrey, Bishop of Ely, in the mid to late 1170s. *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 833.

⁶⁰² *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 833.

⁶⁰³ “Saluo servitio meo” *EEA* 31, no. 48.

⁶⁰⁴ *EEA* 31, nos. 47, 45.

a tenant held from the house and that he, or occasionally she, owed service for the land, mitigated the damage to a house's finances. Tenants also allowed houses to put less work into the oversight of small or distant lands. All of the Fenland prelates were regularly involved in this sort of limited alienation with conventual approval.

Grants of Lands

Over the course of his prelatey Walter, Abbot of Ramsey, granted many properties of the house to tenants. For the most part these were small. As with much of Ramsey's mid-twelfth century documentation, dating is imprecise and can often be only placed to sometime during Walter's abbacy from 1133-1161. For example, Walter's concession of land apparently in Hilgay, Norfolk to Godlamb son of But could have occurred at any point during those twenty-eight years.⁶⁰⁵ As appropriate, the grant included a payment: in this case three shillings and ten sticks of eels were due annually. This transaction is notable as an apparent example of the abbey's lands being extended through drainage of the fens. Godlamb's fee consisted of ten acres and new land that he already held through one William the reeve as well as two acres to be determined by Walter and the convent.⁶⁰⁶ The "new land" mentioned suggests either fen drainage or assarting, a process that Godlamb was apparently to continue.⁶⁰⁷ The mention of eels would suppose that the land lay by the fens. Even in a charter that looks fairly mundane, Walter was advancing his abbey's well-being by ensuring that growth in the abbey's lands would be enshrined in a written relationship.

Walter oversaw other grants of abbey lands to tenants throughout his career as evidenced by charters granting separate lands to one Alfino, or Alfelino, Faceto of Welles [Outwell and Upwell, Cambridgeshire].⁶⁰⁸ The first grant was made while Ramsey had a prior also named Walter. This prior was serving in 1149, but not in 1154 x 1160 when Lambert was prior. In his first grant, Abbot Walter gave land in Emneth, Norfolk, to Alfino who is described "our man and brother, servant and faithful one."⁶⁰⁹ Thus, it seems that Walter was making a grant to a reliable recipient who had a close relationship to the abbey. In addition, the grant was not a new loss to abbey demesne, but a transfer of a holding that had been held by another man, Siwate Hod. However, Walter's charter was for a long-term

⁶⁰⁵ *CMR* i, 149-150.

⁶⁰⁶ "*Praepositus.*"

⁶⁰⁷ "Et sic quod praedictus Godlambus nobiscum pactionem fecit, quod super feodum nostrum hospitabitur, et quicquid super terram nostram crescet, super eundem feodum locabit." *CMR* i, 150.

⁶⁰⁸ *CMR* ii, 268. Dating is narrowed by the presence of Prior Walter as a witness. He witnessed a 1149 charter (*CMR* ii 268-269 and *CAR*, 268-269), but Prior Lambert witnessed a charter most likely to date to Henry II (*CMR* i, 256-257 and *CMR* ii, 265; *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 1816).

⁶⁰⁹ "Homini et confratri nostro, servienti et fideli nostro" *CMR* ii, 268.

grant to both Alfino and his heirs for a set rent of 8s. 4d. annually. Alfino must have proved a faithful tenant at Emneth because some time later, when Lambert was prior, Walter granted him and his heirs the land of Ulf of Hilgay, Norfolk.⁶¹⁰ Presumably this land was at Hilgay based on the previous tenant's name and the fact that Walter mentioned a reeve in Hilgay. As in Emneth, Alfino was to pay rent, 6s. per year. Taken together, these two donations show Walter making donations to a tenant whom he judged to be reliable, and these decisions were not taken one after the other, but over a period of time. Both properties were also a fair distance from Ramsey, lying just across the Cambridgeshire/Norfolk border. Although Walter received criticism for his alienations of the abbey's lands without conventual consent, both these examples are witnessed by the house's priors. As he fulfilled this normal part of abbatial duties, granting out lands, he was working with the monks of the house.

Another new grant that merely re-granted lands of the abbey was made to John son of Richard between 1147 and 1151.⁶¹¹ Here Walter gave John land in Mareham on the Hill, Lincolnshire that had been held by one Wlgetus. Although this grant by Walter might be seen to remove land from Ramsey's direct control, it also may well have been to the house's benefit. In the years after Geoffrey's invasion there was much work to be done to re-establish abbatial control of Ramsey's lands, as discussed in the *Narratio de Abbate Gualtero*. Ramsey lies about sixty miles south of the land in question. Therefore, setting up a reliable tenant might well have been better for the abbey's financial administration than sending officers to and from the land to oversee its use and collect its produce. Perhaps to ensure good tenancy of a holding so far distant from the abbey, "John swore homage to the abbot for the aforementioned land in the presence of Robert, Bishop of Lincoln."⁶¹² John also promised to pay ten shillings annually at Ramsey, either in person or by a representative. This grant is another example of Walter seeing to his abbey's well-being, although, conceivably, a monk who did not approve of him might view it unfavorably.

A final grant by Walter seems to go slightly further. Sometime between 1133 and 1151 Walter gave land in Snore and Fordham, Norfolk, to Ralph of Barton for one silver mark a year.⁶¹³ This donation took place on the abbey's saint's day, with the convent's agreement and with Robert, Abbot of Thorney as the one recorded witness. Considering these facts, the donation was certainly aboveboard. The land in question was Snore, land

⁶¹⁰ *CMR* ii, 270.

⁶¹¹ *CMR* i, 258-259 and *CMR* ii, 266.

⁶¹² "Johannes autem homagium et liganciam de illa praedicta terra fecit Abbati, in praesentia Roberti Episcopi Lincolnensis." The charter itself was witnessed by no less than five abbots (St Albans, Crowland, Bardney, Kirkstead, and Revesby), a collection of prelates that makes dating easier. *CMR* ii, 266.

⁶¹³ *CMR* ii, 267.

previously held by Thorkil of Hirst, and land held by Alfin, priest of Fordham. In Domesday both these lands were presented together with two other lands.⁶¹⁴ All together the lands recorded in Domesday amounted to less than one hide and were valued at slightly over £5. Unfortunately for precise bookkeeping, Walter's charter does not specify the extent of the lands granted to Ralph; the reader presumably would have known what lands the previous tenants held. The recipient, Ralph, appears elsewhere in Ramsey accounts. He witnessed two charters and, in a charter from 1150 x 1160, is mentioned as one of the men of the younger William de Say, son of Beatrice de Mandeville and William de Say who was accused of encouraging his brother-in-law's rebellion.⁶¹⁵ Although Walter's grant to Ralph possibly predates his dated connection to the Say family, Ralph may well have been connected to the Says earlier. Perhaps this grant shows a rapprochement between Ramsey and Earl Geoffrey's confederates. In any case, the grant to Ralph, taken out of the context of Geoffrey's invasion, shows Walter once again granting out lands for a fixed income. Without knowing the extent of the lands it is hard to know whether or not Ralph was paying a reasonable rent, but the abbey would be freed from monitoring the land and would perhaps be building ties with an important magnate through an associate of his. Again this is another example of abbot Walter using the standard practice of alienation to attempt to ensure the well-being of the abbey.

Abbot Robert of Thorney also used the continuation of alienation to benefit his house. The grants made by Abbot Robert of Thorney are challenging to date precisely to Stephen's reign because he was abbot for twenty years before Henry I's death. Nevertheless, looking at two specific examples shows something of what Robert did while abbot. In the first instance he confirmed the grant of his predecessor, Gunter, of land in Twywell, Northamptonshire, to Robert son of Aubrey II de Vere.⁶¹⁶ That Gunter's grant took place during the reign of Henry I demonstrates that granting of lands to tenants was no novel practice and that Robert's later actions were not simply a result of the unrest of Stephen's reign. In the second instance, Robert can also be seen giving land in Bolnhurst, Bedfordshire, to one Hugh son of Ricolde.⁶¹⁷ As part of the agreement, Hugh had to swear fealty and be made the abbot's man. It is hard to assess this donation at all since the charter merely identifies the land in question as that of Fulk excepting some held by Lefric. Nevertheless, it was not a new alienation from demesne to a tenant, but rather a continued alienation to a new tenant. Of course, there may

⁶¹⁴ Norfolk 215v., Phillimore, 16.2.

⁶¹⁵ Ralph appears as William's man in *CAR*, 305; He witnesses in *CMR* i, 151-152; *CAR* 271-272 and *CMR* i, 153; *CMR* ii, 267-268.

⁶¹⁶ *RB Thorney* ii, 416r-v.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 419v.

have been a change in terms. In this example, as in Twywell, Robert was not overseeing the new loss of demesne lands: he was ensuring that their continued tenancy was clearly tied to the abbey.

Exchange of Lands

Moving on from new and renewed grants, prelates might also oversee the exchange of lands as part of their usual governance of their house. In a somewhat complicated charter from Ramsey attested by many witnesses, Walter and the convent “*communicavimus Roberto de Laushalle*” his land in Broughton, Huntingdonshire, and “*dedimus ei in commutatione*” the land that one Simeon held in Lawshall, Suffolk.⁶¹⁸ Although *communicare* can often be translated “to impart,” the context indicates that Walter and the convent were exchanging a piece of land far from Ramsey for one in a nearby and important manor. Broughton served as the seat of Ramsey’s manor and was the location of its court.⁶¹⁹ The exchange was written to ensure Robert’s rights to his new land. Walter required only the service that had been owed by the previous tenant at Lawshall and explicitly guaranteed the land to Robert and his successors against any claim from any abbot of Ramsey or the convent.⁶²⁰ This charter seems to represent Walter doing his duty to care for the house. His exchange seems to have benefitted both the house and the tenant. Based upon his name, Robert of Lawshall likely already held land in the Suffolk manor and could enjoy a more unified holding. He remained connected to Ramsey, appearing in the abbey’s *Carta* of 1166 owing service for one hide.⁶²¹

A third way in which prelates administered the land pertaining to their houses was in the oversight of inheritance. The confirmation charters that they granted helped to ensure that both the house and the recipient remembered that the land was held from the house and that service of some sort was due.

Two charters show Walter dealing with the inheritance of land. At some point Walter conceded to one Ailbern of Therfield, Hertfordshire, the land that he held [*tenet*] and set out the holding’s descent to Ailbern’s grandson Matthew, or, if Matthew predeceased Ailbern, Matthew’s brother Albert.⁶²² However, when Albert was dead, his body and half his wealth were to be carried to Ramsey church. A second charter, also undated, shows the first

⁶¹⁸ *CMR* i, 150-151 and *CAR*, 270-271.

⁶¹⁹ *VCH Huntingdonshire*, ii, 158-164.

⁶²⁰ *CMR* i, 150-151 and *CAR*, 270-271.

⁶²¹ *RB Exchequer*, 371.

⁶²² *CMR* i, 150 and *CAR*, 270. The *Chronicon* version adds the italicized words. “Notum vobis sit nos concessisse Ailberno de Ferefeld, *in capitulo rectum suum in feudo quod tenet de ecclesia nostra in eadem Ferefeld* et post ipsius obitum ...” Both charters refer to Matthew as Ailbern’s *nepos*; the subsequent charter considers Ailbern the *avus* of Matthew, suggesting that *nepos* means *grandson* in this case.

eventuality had occurred and Matthew was granted possession of his grandfather's land for the rent of one silver mark a year.⁶²³ This charter makes no mention of additional descent, but retaining the previous charter would no doubt provide legal proof of the issue should it be brought to court. This is another example of a house giving lands for inheritance, but it also demonstrates in practice that the first charter was not sufficient after the death of its recipient: it benefited both the church and heir to confirm the tenancy. As both usual and appropriate, Abbot Walter oversaw both these actions.

Granting Churches

Not only did prelates oversee the granting of lands, but their monastic houses also granted churches with their associated revenue. Important clerics such as archdeacons were common recipients of churches.⁶²⁴ For example, sometime after the worst of the Anarchy, although possibly during Stephen's reign, Abbot Walter of Ramsey gave the living of Shillington, Bedfordshire, to Roger of Almaria, precentor of Lincoln.⁶²⁵ This was a significant enough donation to be witnessed by Archbishop Theobald, and the bishops of Norwich, Ely, and Lincoln. As no doubt fitting for such a donation, Roger could not alienate it and when he died or became a monk the church would revert to the almonry. Furthermore, whilst Roger held the living, he owed 5s. annually for the feeding of paupers. The church must have returned to the abbey as Ramsey held possession of Shillington church until the Dissolution.⁶²⁶ More important than the history of this church itself is the indication of Ramsey's business encompassing the donation of a church to an important figure in the diocese with an audience of some of the most significant prelates of the realm. The grant also notes clearly that Walter took this action with the support of the convent, an action that argues against the bad reputation he was given by the comments in the *Cartularium*. This case is one more piece of evidence that shows Walter fulfilling normal abbatial duties in a canonically approved way.

At Peterborough Abbot Martin made a similar grant to William, archdeacon of Northampton.⁶²⁷ He was the *nepos* of Alexander, bishop of Lincoln and first appears *c.* 1133.⁶²⁸ The church and its appurtenances would still yield Peterborough one silver mark a year. Furthermore, the gift was only until William died or undertook the religious life, which

⁶²³ *CMR* i, 152 and *CAR*, 273-274.

⁶²⁴ Crowland Abbey provides an example in its grant of the church of Dry Drayton, Cambridgeshire to William of Lavington, Archdeacon of Ely in 1155 x 1158. As diocesan Nigel issued a charter concerning the issue. *EEA* 31, no. 93.

⁶²⁵ *CMR* ii, 175 and *CAR*, 303-304. Roger was also Archdeacon of Stow.

⁶²⁶ *VCH Bedfordshire*, ii, 299.

⁶²⁷ *Swaffham*, 115v.

⁶²⁸ *EEA* I: Lincoln 1067-1185, ed. David M Smith (London, 1980), xliii and no. 24; John Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1066-1300: Volume 3, Lincoln*, comp. Diana E Greenway (London, 1977), 30.

he was welcomed to do at Peterborough. There is no dating for this grant, but such an arrangement could have been made at any time during Martin's abbacy as William outlived him. Unlike the Ramsey donation, Martin's gift had no churchmen in attendance but was granted surrounded by the knights of his barony. However, Martin did have the convent's approval as well, as would be standard practice.

There may have been other unrecorded or non-extant cases of donations to prominent churchmen. As mentioned above, Ramsey's church at Warboys, Huntingdonshire, had Nicholas de Sigillo as a tenant although no charter remains making that grant.⁶²⁹ Perhaps other valuable livings were assigned to well-connected clerics. Since the prelates were involved in the highest level of Anglo-Norman society, it would not be surprising that they kept their houses connected to high-ranking clerics and their patrons as well. Although the Fens themselves might have seemed desolate, the houses were not cut off from civilization.

In Ely, Nigel also oversaw the granting away of church livings, but the context was more contested. In 1152 he announced the settlement of a living that was being held by a clerk without the convent's assent. The first mention of this case is a mandate from Eugenius III in February 1152 to Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, that Theobald help the prior and monks of Ely reclaim a number of churches held without their consent.⁶³⁰ Although Theobald acted quickly to resolve these disputes, the case of Wentworth church and its unlawful occupant Nicholas the Chaplain had already been brought to a happy conclusion between Nicholas and the monks of Ely under Nigel's oversight as Theobald reported sometime later that year.⁶³¹ According to Nigel's charter the monks agreed to his request that Nicholas be granted the church for an annual rent of 5s.⁶³² The emphasis here on Nigel's agency is slightly at variance with Theobald's charter that seems to place the monks as the key actors. Theobald's charter reads "we confirm the agreement even the one made between the monks themselves and Nicholas the chaplain ... just as the charter of our brother Nigel of Ely witnesses it to have been made."⁶³³ Although technically the monks did make the agreement with Nicholas, it was with Nigel's urging. In any case, Nigel played a role in ensuring that Nicholas' initially troublesome tenure be clearly defined by a mutually agreeable deal that explicitly set out the monks' ownership of the church and required annual rent to defray the

⁶²⁹ See above page 101.

⁶³⁰ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 105, pp. 353-354. The pope's attention was probably directed at these cases during the monks' interaction with him in the long running Stetchworth dispute.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 106, pp. 354-355.

⁶³² *EEA* 31, no. 68.

⁶³³ "Compositionem quoque factum inter ipsos monachos et Nicholaum capellanum ... sicut carta fratris nostri Nig' Elyensis eam factam esse testator ... confirmamus." *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 106, pp. 354-355.

loss of revenue. This dispute shows Nigel playing a fairly positive role in his abbey's well-being late in Stephen's reign. He seems to have been helping the abbey and received no criticism from Archbishop Theobald. Although Nigel was often criticized for taking advantage of his monks, in this case he seems to have been fulfilling his duty.

The Fenland prelates' disposal of lands and churches show that they occupied themselves with their houses' everyday business of preserving income sources. Preservation did not always mean seeking to bring possessions back into an abbey's immediate control. The granting out of lands and churches does not show a lack of care for the monks' well-being, but rather a sensible use of resources. For example in Ramsey, at some point during his tenure Walter granted land in Walsoken, Norfolk to one Thomas and his heirs.⁶³⁴ Unlike the normal language of Walter's charters granting land, this one makes no reference to the monks agreeing with his grant.⁶³⁵ Silence at this point likely means that the abbot held this land independently of the monks and thus did not feel the need to gain their approval. This proposal is supported by the inclusion of Walsoken in a list of the lands of the abbot at the end of the *Cartularium*.⁶³⁶ It seems that Walter's grant was out of land almost certainly set aside for the abbot's own portion and indicates that he was treating his own lands the same as he would those assigned to the convent. Regardless of whether a prelate was dealing with his own lands or those of the monks the granting of lands was a standard use of resources and not an especial indication of carelessness with ecclesiastical property. Abbots and bishops needed to make some pragmatic decisions, and the evidence from the Fenland houses shows them doing just that.

Lawsuits

A final part of the standard prelatial responsibilities was dealing with lawsuits. Since the houses held vast estates, they were subject both to claims on their lands from any number of sources and to tenants' failure to fulfill their obligations. In some cases the only rectification for these disputes was to seek justice in court. In such cases, the prelates often played a role in assisting their houses. This section will not consider every important lawsuit. Some, such

⁶³⁴ *CMR* i, 153; ii, 267-268.

⁶³⁵ The language of the grantor in this charter is regularly in first-person plural: "nos concessisse ... terram nostrum ... nobis et successoribus nostris," however, that is not markedly different from other charters. *CMR* i, 153; ii, 267-268. The grant to Nicholas the Mercer of land in London also lacks reference to the convent. *CAR*, 308-309. As does the grant to Berengar Monachus of Hemmington, Northamptonshire. *CMR* ii, 269; *CAR*, 273.

⁶³⁶ *CMR* iii, 169. This list quite possibly dates to the fourteenth century, but may well reflect earlier practice to a certain degree. It cannot be a precise correspondence since *CMR* records complaints about Walter alienating some of the lands without the convent's assent whilst they are here assigned to the abbot.

as Ramsey's generation-spanning quest for Over and Ely's battle for Stetchworth are discussed more fully elsewhere in the thesis.⁶³⁷ The cases discussed here will show the Fenland prelates fulfilling their regular role of representing their houses in court. There are few cases from the Fenland houses dating to Stephen's reign. In order to more fully discuss the Fenland prelates, this section will include several cases that antedate Stephen's reign but demonstrate the actions of prelates who were serving during Stephen's time as king. This information helps to flesh out their character and normal prelatical activity.

Before Stephen's reign the Fenland prelates demonstrate their commitment to safeguarding their houses rights in several lawsuits. Early in his abbacy, between 1114 and 1124, Abbot Robert of Thorney managed to reclaim the right of Bolnhurst church from William Peverel.⁶³⁸ Robert also successfully sued one Almod the Archdeacon for the return of the manor of Sawbridge, Warwickshire.⁶³⁹ Henry I issued a charter in this case on Thorney's behalf thus dating it prior to Stephen's reign. The most lengthy recorded lawsuits from Thorney occurred in the earlier years of Robert's abbacy during Henry I's reign.⁶⁴⁰ This determined case of Abbot Robert's against Robert of Yaxley shows that an abbot could diligently further his house's cause. Peterborough also shows a similar pattern. Martin's first act records him summoning an illegitimate tenant to surrender the lands she held occurred in 1133 or 1135.⁶⁴¹ Another case, regarding half an acre of land held wrongfully by a priest is undatable.⁶⁴² Early in his career Nigel was involved in a significant legal proceeding when he reclaimed lands at the Wandlebury Plea. This proceeding, although finished after Stephen's ascension, was begun while Henry I still reigned.⁶⁴³ Even before any cases arose during the troubles of Stephen's reign, the Fenland prelates had legal cases that prove their commitment to securing their houses' rights.

As mentioned above, in the midst of Stephen's reign, during Matilda's brief ascendancy, she oversaw settlement of a case between two Fenland houses themselves.⁶⁴⁴ Nigel of Ely and Walter of Ramsey had a lengthy quarrel that is unmentioned by narrative sources from Ely. However, both the Ramsey *Cartularium* and *Chronicon* record the agreement that came about through the action of the Empress Matilda, six bishops, two earls,

⁶³⁷ For Over see page 72; for Stetchworth see page 74.

⁶³⁸ *RB Thorney* ii, 417r.; *Charters of David I*, ed. Barrows, 54.

⁶³⁹ *RB Thorney* ii, 419r.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 417ff; Lady Stenton provided a discussion of the case and translation of its history. Stenton, *English Justice*, 140-147.

⁶⁴¹ *Swaffham*, 113v-114r.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, 114r.

⁶⁴³ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 48, p. 287.

⁶⁴⁴ See above page 89.

and two magnates.⁶⁴⁵ The charter, issued by Nigel in what must be somewhere between April and July of 1141, announces that he and Walter are now in agreement and that all that pertains to the abbot or the church of Ramsey should be restored. The one-sided result perhaps explains why Ely failed to comment on it. The author's love of his house may have trumped his love of pointing out Nigel's failings. In any case, the cause of the quarrel remains mysterious. Karn suggests that it must relate to some topic unconnected with Stephen's reign because neither Nigel nor Walter was a friend of the king's.⁶⁴⁶ While this conclusion is plausible, it is not necessarily true. Another explanation would be that Nigel violated Walter's land during his rebellion against Stephen. Furthermore, the case for Walter being an enemy of Stephen's is far from certain.⁶⁴⁷ In any case, the dispute between Nigel and Walter shows that Nigel and his men did not respect a fellow abbey and had to be brought to justice when the opportunity arose. It also shows the diligence of Abbot Walter in pursuing his house's best interest. Even in the uncertain days of mid 1141 a conscientious abbot would be striving to defend the rights of his house as a regular matter of his duties.

Other cases of inter-abbatial quarrels more clearly had to do with defined resources. For example, where estates met on fens it seemed that disputes over fishing rights were bound to occur. A Peterborough entry notes a disagreement over fishing rights on Whittlesea Mere that involved Ramsey, Thorney, and Peterborough.⁶⁴⁸ The arrangement allowed Peterborough two nights of fishing and provided Ramsey and Thorney with one night each. This agreement was made at the end of Stephen's reign during the abbacy of Gilbert at Thorney, 1151 x 1154. But such a contention was not necessarily a result of the turmoil surrounding Stephen's reign as evidenced by records of similar disputes under Henry I.⁶⁴⁹ Regardless of when they occurred, prelates would find it necessary to ensure that their house received the best treatment possible.

Not all suits during Stephen's reign were between monastic houses. One suit, likely dating to 1153 x 1154, was brought by the monks of Ely against Nigel's goldsmith and frequent companion, William Monachus of Shelford.⁶⁵⁰ After he refused to pay the monks of

⁶⁴⁵ *CMR* i, 254 and *CAR*, 307-308; *EEA* 31, no. 72.

⁶⁴⁶ *EEA* 31, no. 72, pp. 101-102.

⁶⁴⁷ See above page 90-92.

⁶⁴⁸ *Swaffham*, 116r.

⁶⁴⁹ *RRAN* ii, no. 1410; *RB Thorney* ii, 418v-419r.

⁶⁵⁰ *EEA* 31, no. 36. William Monachus was involved in Nigel's use of the church's treasures to fund his journey. He also stood as a witness for the monks in their case against Stephen de Scalers concerning land in Shelford. Finally, he donated to St Radegund's, Cambridge and eventually became a monk of Ely himself. *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 78, p. 325; ch. 89, p. 335; ch. 90, p. 337; ch. 92, p. 340; ch. 115, p. 364; *EEA* 31, no. 20; Van Houts, Elisabeth, "Nuns and goldsmiths" in *Church and City*, eds. David Abulafia, et al. (Cambridge, 1992), 59-79.

Ely what they claimed, the monks forced William to surrender the disputed manor of Stapleford, Cambridgeshire, before he regained it, clearly acknowledging that he held it from them. Nigel seems not to have taken a very active role in the case, but he did support the monks. In this case, an example of withholding rent played out during the relatively peacefully early 1150s. The monks of Ely seemed to gain little help from Nigel instead receiving support from Archbishop Theobald. There is no particular suggestion that this taking of land resulted from the Anarchy. More likely it was a prelatial familiar availing himself of what he could.

Having considered some of the normal activities the prelates engaged in, we can discern the range of responsibilities they fulfilled. While in several individual cases there may be grounds for complaint, the overall picture is one of prelates who were interested in seeing to the well-being of their house. At points, Nigel of Ely stands an exception in showing less care for his monks in his donations and activities. Regardless, the overall pattern seems to suggest an appropriate carrying out of prelatial duties. Although there are some apparent lulls, specifically in cases of lawsuits, the Fenland prelates apparently continued oversight of the normal business of a mediaeval monastic house. In the case of lawsuits, their relative paucity may reflect of the unrest sweeping the Fens.

Criticism of Prelates

Clearly the prelates of the above houses were regularly busy attending to their duties. However, local sources also record complaints about the bishop and abbots failing in these duties. While some of these “failures” may be merely set down to a biased recording of events, some no doubt accurately reflect problems that came between the monks and their prelates. One major concern with commenting on these alleged transgressions of prelatial norms is that they were largely carried out during the disturbances of Stephen’s reign. It seems likely that many of the problems between a prelate and his monks were affected by the circumstances of the reign, although not necessarily caused by it.⁶⁵¹ On the other hand, a prelate could create problems for his monks by incurring the king’s displeasure, as evidenced by the fear expressed by Abbot Geoffrey of St Albans to Christina of Markyate when he sought to avoid serving Stephen overseas.⁶⁵² In any case, mediaeval abbeys and bishoprics

⁶⁵¹ See Clark, “This Ecclesiastical Adventurer,” 548-560. The history of Abbot Henri de Saint Jean d’Angély at Peterborough in the last years of Henry I’s reign shows that even when the king had firm control of the country, a house could be troubled by internal strife between abbot and monks.

⁶⁵² *Christina of Markyate*, ed. Talbot, 162-165.

were affected by violence, and a prelate was not excused for making poor decisions simply because his country was not at peace. A prelate was to be a father to his monks and care for them even during tumultuous times. This last portion of the chapter will consider areas in which the Fenland prelates were criticized by their monks for ostensible failings. It will then conclude by arguing to what extent the prelates can be blamed for these failures and how they contributed to the turmoil that was unique to Stephen's reign.

Absence

Ecclesiastical absence, whether physical or emotional, was a complaint noted by the houses' monks. Of the four prelates Nigel, as a curial bishop, would have the most reason to neglect his cure and be absent from his house. As noted in the *Liber Eliensis*, no sooner had he been enthroned than Nigel left for court.⁶⁵³ This pattern continued throughout his career. Although his fall from Stephen's grace separated Nigel from the close and busy relationship that he had with the government under Henry I, once Henry II came to the throne Nigel resumed his role as a senior official in the government. The *Liber* most criticizes Nigel for leaving a worthless and malign deputy in his place. While the absence of a curial bishop might be understood, such dereliction of duty was unacceptable in the writer's mind.

However, although Nigel was the most frequently absent prelate, he was not the only one. Abbot Martin of Peterborough also neglected his monks for a time, although with a less worldly aim. Some time after his trip to Pope Eugenius III, the abbot, having become overburdened with the trials of leading Peterborough during the Anarchy, "again crossed the sea and there for some time went among the places of the solitaries."⁶⁵⁴ No further detail illuminates this passage by Hugh Candidus. Whether Martin's absence was either a planned sabbatical or an escape from responsibilities, it did not change the end of his career as recorded in Hugh Candidus's work. Hugh praised Martin's record, noting that "having returned, [the abbot] held his abbacy with honour although with labour."⁶⁵⁵ Even for such a well-regarded abbot as Martin, the burden of leading an abbey, perhaps particularly during such a trying time, necessitated a respite and absence from his abbatial duties.

In Ramsey Walter never left his monks whilst abbot, but his troubles with Daniel seem to stem from a disinclination to undertake the less spiritual abbatial duties. The enticement of Daniel's accomplices bears this out.

⁶⁵³ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 45, pp. 284-285.

⁶⁵⁴ "Set iterum mare transfretauit, et ibi aliquamdiu per loca solitariorum iuit." *HC*, ed. Mellows, 122.

⁶⁵⁵ "Tamen iterum reuersus, honorifice quamuis cum labore abbaciam suam tenuit." *Ibid.*, 122.

“Look, *pious* father, how industriously, how manfully, how wisely your son Daniel arranges all of your business; how praiseworthy he labours in your services, how cheerfully he bears the burden and heat of the day⁶⁵⁶ desiring nothing else, doing nothing else if not that he be able to satisfy your wish and provide for your peace, that no complaint, no worldly tumult, might be able to disturb your spirit and from your holy purpose and prayer by importunate request call back!”⁶⁵⁷

This lengthy temptation scene asserts that the abbot desired to avoid the secular business of the abbey. The themes in this passage are continued when Walter imagines his happiness if he were freed from the burdens of the abbacy and could surround himself with a purely religious world.⁶⁵⁸ Of course, Walter’s reckless surrender of his position to the king without listening to his *familia* led to trouble for Ramsey. So Walter, Nigel, and Martin all show how a prelate might neglect his house, but each has varying consequences with much dependent upon the circumstances. Perhaps surprisingly Walter is the one most criticized. Martin’s absence seems to have been brief and forgivable. Nigel’s, although contested, was somewhat appropriate. Furthermore, the monks of Ely were perhaps pleased to be free of the bishop’s presence. However, Walter, whose history is relayed by a sympathetic source, is still shown in a negative light. His understandable disinclination to worldly affairs helps bring disaster upon his house and his “dovelike simplicity” prevented him from seeing into Daniel’s wicked plot.⁶⁵⁹ However, after Walter returned from Rome, he is shown to combine his spiritual bent with a diligence in restoring the house’s territorial and financial house. It is only when he is fully engaged with both the spiritual and temporal duties of an abbot – not neglecting either – that Walter is successful.

Misusing Resources

Another complaint raised by the monks was of prelates misusing their church’s financial resources. Although it may appear that this is particularly associated with the troubles of Stephen’s reign, the problem did extend more broadly throughout the prelates’ lifetimes. The

⁶⁵⁶ This allusion to Matthew 20.12 emphasizes Daniel’s purported virtue since unlike the labourers of the parable who worked all day and complained when those who only arrived at the last minute were paid the same wage, Daniel’s only concern is for Abbot Walter’s well-being.

⁶⁵⁷ “Ecce, pie pater, quam strenue, quam viriliter, quam sapienter, filius vester Daniel cuncta vestra disponit, quam laudabiliter in obsequiis vestris desudat, quam libenter pro vobis portat pondus diei et aestus, nihil aliud desiderans, nihil aliud agens, nisi ut vestrae satisfacere possit voluntati et quietudini providere, ut nihil querelae, nihil tumultus secularis, animum vestrum possit perturbare et a sancto proposito vestro et orationem instantia revocare!” *CAR*, 326.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁶⁵⁹ *CAR*, 330. However, this simplicity is presented as an asset at Rome.

complaint about Martin suggests his misappropriation occurred whilst Henry I was still king. Misuse of lands happened at Ramsey well into Henry II's reign, and Nigel used abbey funds to procure a post for his son after Stephen was no longer king.

The ready financial resources of Ely's treasures were known in detail to Nigel after the unraveling of Ranulf's conspiracy when the *Liber* records a list of the church's treasures compiled at Nigel's request.⁶⁶⁰ However, it was not until after Nigel's family's fall from grace in mid-1139 that the bishop based himself in Ely. This move was followed by armed defiance of the king, flight to Matilda's camp at Gloucester, and an eventual return to Ely. Once returned Nigel found himself short of ready cash and began to avail himself of the monks' treasures. The author of the *Liber Eliensis* says that Nigel "was driven by the wickedness of his men to seize the goods on the inside and put up for sale some properties of the church"⁶⁶¹ On the other hand, some of the losses were not due to any wrongdoing on Nigel's part. When traveling to see Matilda he was robbed at Wareham of many valuables including goods given by St Aethelwold and other notable donors, gold and silver ornaments, and "a privilege, on which the church afterwards spent fifty-two marks."⁶⁶² This unfortunate loss was followed by Nigel demanding gold and silver ornaments from the monks in order to pay for a journey to Rome.⁶⁶³ Although he promised the monks a manor as collateral, the monks were unhappy with the loss of goods. After he returned from a successful visit to the papal court, Nigel was confronted by an unhappy King Stephen. In order to placate Stephen, Nigel extracted 200 more marks from the monks.⁶⁶⁴ This loan was never repaid, although the monks did gain the manor of Hadstock. For the rest of Nigel's career he continued to experience financial needs and he repeatedly took treasures from the monks.⁶⁶⁵ Two significant losses were those of a chasuble and a gospel book given by King Edgar. The Gospel Book was to be "as a sign of [the church's] liberty and munificent endowment."⁶⁶⁶ The monks valued this book so greatly that they paid 200 marks to regain possession of it from moneylenders in Cambridge. The narrator of the *Liber*, gaining some comfort from justice, noted the wretched ends of the clerics who encouraged Nigel in his depredations.

⁶⁶⁰ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk III, ch. 50, pp. 288-294.

⁶⁶¹ "Perversitas suorum ... bona interius diripere et possessiones ecclesie nonnullis coactus est exponere." *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 73, p. 322.

⁶⁶² "Privilegium i, pro quo ecclesia postea expendidit lii marcas." *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 78, pp. 324-326.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 78, pp. 325-326.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 89, pp. 334-335.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 92, pp. 338-341.

⁶⁶⁶ "Ob signum libertatis sue atque munificentie." *LE*, ed. Blake, III, ch. 92, p. 339; *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth Compiled by a Monk of Ely in the Twelfth Century*, trans. Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 416.

Even after Stephen's death when Nigel enjoyed royal favor under Henry II, the bishop continued to extract money from the monks. At one point Nigel sought to purchase the post of treasurer for his son Richard (later famous as the author of the *Dialogus de Scaccario*) and he helped himself to the treasures of the cathedral, "the house of St Aethelthryth," on the grounds that the church always had enough goods.⁶⁶⁷ On the same occasion Nigel "took a pall which Queen Emma had given as a covering of the holy virgin's tomb and, with the monks unwilling, set it out for sale to the bishop of Lincoln for cash."⁶⁶⁸ This wrong, at least, was righted after the bishop of Lincoln tried to give the pall to the pope. He inquired as to its provenance and then demanded that the monks of Ely regain their possession.⁶⁶⁹ Although the narrative structure of the *Liber Eliensis* makes its account of Nigel's depredations long, it does not apportion all the blame to Nigel. His advisers as well as the thieves at Wareham receive their share of the blame. But ultimately, Nigel is the most culpable individual in the history. According to the *Liber's* author, Nigel failed to honor Ely's saints and to care for its monks by actively dispersing the church's treasures for his own personal benefit.

In contrast, Hugh Candidus, a monk of Peterborough, thought highly of his prelate, Abbot Martin. Martin's arrival in 1133 "with the monks' agreement" stands in stark contrast to the career of the house's previous abbot, Henry de St-Jean d'Angely.⁶⁷⁰ Martin worked hard throughout the years of Stephen's reign: years of "great sorrow and tribulation [for the] Holy Church," according to Hugh.⁶⁷¹ Yet despite the many good things that Martin did, Hugh notes that "because he had removed much of the treasures when he first became [abbot], he [later] established the vill of Pilsgate ... for their restoration and for the building of the church."⁶⁷² Following this mention of wrongdoing, Hugh seems to move on. He reproduces the papal charters Martin obtained for the church, discusses Whitby Abbey and how Peterborough's prior became Whitby's abbot, and summarizes Martin's good deeds. But it is of note that later on in his account, Hugh returns to expand on Martin's one failing and restates his abstraction of the church's treasure "at the Devil's instigation."⁶⁷³ This reemphasizing of Martin's sole slip-up shows what a striking problem it was. Martin's career

⁶⁶⁷ Richard fitzNigel, *Dialogus de Scaccario The Dialogue of the Exchequer*, ed. and trans. Emilie Amt (Oxford, 2007), xiv-xviii; *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 122, p. 372.

⁶⁶⁸ "Pallam ... quam Ymma regina in velamentum sepulchri sacre virginis obtulerat, accepit atque monachis inuitis episcopo Linolnensi pro nummis exposuit." *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 122, p. 372.

⁶⁶⁹ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 122-123, pp. 371-373.

⁶⁷⁰ "Per consensum monachorum." *HC*, ed. Mellows, 103.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

⁶⁷² "Et quia in primordio suo multa de thesauris abstulerat, ad restauranda eadem et ad ecclesiam faciendam, uillam [*de*] Pilesgetam ... constituit." *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁷³ "Per instincionem diaboli." *Ibid.*, 122.

at Peterborough should have been seen as triumph after triumph. Compared to the neighboring houses of Ely and Ramsey, Peterborough has little record of suffering. Martin was abbot during many great events. He oversaw the consecration of the new church in the presence of prelates, monks, barons, and knights; he received the king; he made the abbey a great source of charity; and he changed the layout of the town growing up around the abbey.⁶⁷⁴ Yet despite so much praise for a “holy and religious man ... loved by God and men,” his taking of treasures at the beginning of his abbacy was so acutely felt that more than two decades later Hugh records it twice and attributes it to the Devil.⁶⁷⁵ It is particularly noteworthy that this action took place when he first became abbot. Unless Hugh was being imprecise in his wording, Martin’s misdeed predated Stephen’s reign and the accompanying turmoil. This dating suggests that a prelate might easily find need to dip into his house’s coffers even if there were no significant turmoil underway.

Ramsey gives both a brief mention of its abbot’s actions and a long narrative account. The first is that of the compiler of the Ramsey Cartulary. At the end of the section of charters relating to Abbot Walter (1133-1161), the author includes two long lists of alienations by the abbot.⁶⁷⁶ Unfortunately, there is no certainty of dating of the list, which was copied in the fourteenth century.⁶⁷⁷ The list of ornaments states that they were alienated “at the command of Abbot Walter, without the will of the convent, in the time of war.” This is followed by 48 lines, many listing multiple objects. Only one mentions a donor, but many note that the object was made of gold or silver.⁶⁷⁸ In the chapter there is nothing to further explain the alienations, and Walter is not accused of personally benefiting from the loss of these treasures as Nigel did.⁶⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the title baldly accuses him with its phrase “per dictum Walterum abbatem.” He was held culpable, though his guilt was perhaps slightly mitigated by the added phrase “tempore guerrae.” A second and sympathetic account of Walter’s actions comes in the “Narration de Abbate Gualtero” at the end of the *Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseensis*.⁶⁸⁰ Although the narrator does not mention the loss of treasures, he points out

⁶⁷⁴ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 105, 122-123.

⁶⁷⁵ Martinus enim ipse [*monachus*] religiosus et sanctus erat, et ideo a deo et ab hominibus diligebatur. *Ibid.*, 123; in primordio suo multa de thesauris abstulerat. *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁷⁶ *CMR* ii, 273-274.

⁶⁷⁷ *CMR* i, ix; Davis, *Medieval Cartularies*, rev. ed., 158.

⁶⁷⁸ “Unam justam ad modum galli, quam dedit Sibilla, mater Comitissae Gloucestriae, quae ponderavit septem marcas.” *CMR* ii, 274.

⁶⁷⁹ In the preceding list of land alienations that Walter oversaw, his family members profitted somewhat regularly.

⁶⁸⁰ *CAR*, 325-336.

that Walter had to redeem lands with money after Geoffrey de Mandeville's invasion.⁶⁸¹ Walter also had to regain King Stephen's favor by means of approaching the queen and only finalized the process "with much difficulty." Perhaps, like Bishop Nigel, Walter had to purchase Stephen's grace. This history also mentions the abbot's creditors whom Walter eventually paid off. Perhaps the treasures of the church were used to satisfy these debts. Whilst there is a sharp contrast between the cartulary's bald statement that the abbot alienated lands and the kind and diligent father described in the *Narratio*, Walter's questionable alienations may not demonstrate that he was an ill-intentioned abbot, but rather that he violated a strict interpretation of his abbatial duties. While Nigel of Ely is almost entirely presented as an unsympathetic character, and Martin is almost entirely good, Walter seems to have earned both opinions.⁶⁸²

Regardless of the opinion of the prelate, disposing of treasures was sure to elicit censorious comment, and the issue was a significant problem for the relationship between monks and their prelates. It garnered attention in three of the four Fenland houses studied. While neglecting his abbatial duties might be a sin of omission, the alleged misuse of treasures was a noteworthy sin of commission. Even during all of the turmoil of Stephen's reign the monks paid close attention to their treasures.

Granting out Lands without Consent

A final common complaint is that prelates granted out lands without the consent of the convent. Probably the most obvious culprit is Abbot Walter. Ramsey's cartulary has an extensive list of the properties he alienated "without the agreement or will of the convent."⁶⁸³ Whether or not Walter can be blamed for the military devastation during the Anarchy, he was clearly charged with alienating the abbey's lands and treasures against the convent's desire. The cartulary lists twenty-four properties that suffered from this treatment.⁶⁸⁴ Most likely these were not simply lands assigned to the monks' portion. There is no certainty of which lands, if any, had been assigned to the convent by Walter's abbacy. However, a later list marking out this division includes lands that Walter alienated under both convent and abbot.⁶⁸⁵ This shows that regardless of whom in Ramsey the lands benefitted, someone from the abbey found Walter's actions of sub-tenanting the land to be noticeably egregious. This

⁶⁸¹ *CAR.*, 335.

⁶⁸² The same can be noted of Abbot Ingulf of Abingdon. E. g. *Historia Ecclesie Abendonensis* The History of the Church of Abingdon, ed. and trans. John Hudson, vol. i (Oxford, 2002), 238-239, 344-345, 390-393.

⁶⁸³ "Sine assensu et voluntate conventus." *CMR* ii, 270.

⁶⁸⁴ *CMR* ii, 270-272

⁶⁸⁵ *CMR* iii, 169. The cartulary reads "Maneria pertinentia ad cameram Abbatis."

seems surprising since with two exceptions, specific amounts of land are listed, and they only total just short of twenty-five hides. While not insignificant, those hides were approximately seven percent of the abbey's Domesday holdings. Regardless of how little land was granted away, Walter's actions, if the cartulary is correct, violated a key duty of prelates: to avoid alienating church lands.⁶⁸⁶ The *Narratio* disagrees with the cartulary in assessing Walter's habits of alienation, noting that "inspectors and examiners of the alienations of the abbey of Ramsey are scarcely able to find one charter of [Walter's] containing damage to the church."⁶⁸⁷ Despite this testimonial to the abbot, the cartulary's lists suggest that, charters or not, some in the church blamed him for alienating specific lands from the abbey as a whole.

The monks seem to have been particularly troubled by the fact that Abbot Walter's relatives made up a major category of those benefitting from the recorded expropriations. The list names these family members. In Therfield, Hertfordshire, his sister received a virgate of land from the demesne.⁶⁸⁸ Geoffrey, the abbot's "nepos," gained a virgate at Burwell, Cambridgeshire, and one and a half at Lawshall, Suffolk. Michael, another relation of the abbot, gained "our tithes with the church" in Burwell.⁶⁸⁹ In Craunfield, Bedfordshire, Walter gave his "nepos" Richerius the land of one Godwin which amounted to a virgate, three men, thirty cultivated acres of demesne and six or seven acres elsewhere. Ralph, the abbot's "cognatus," gained a virgate and cultivated piece at Shillington, Bedfordshire. Hugh, another "cognatus," gained a virgate in Houghton, Huntingdonshire, and Godfrey, his "nepos," acquired two virgates in Elsworth, Cambridgeshire. Finally, in Ellington, Huntingdonshire, Walter gave "one virgate to Geoffrey the miller's brother, ... and Reginald his [Walter's] brother-in-law, two virgates and many mansuras." This catalogue of alienations shows that Walter supported many of his relations with grants of land from Ramsey. Despite the fact that the grants were extremely modest and unlikely to impinge seriously on the monks' financial well-being, Walter's alienations earned him harsh comment in Ramsey's cartulary. And yet, while the tone may suggest that Walter was grossly violating ecclesiastical norms, giving small grants to one's family members was fairly common practice amongst prelates.

A second category of land recipients is those of whom little can be discovered: they also received relatively small alienations. In Barton, Bedfordshire, one William Travayl

⁶⁸⁶ See Hudson, "Bishops, Abbots, and the Alienation of Church Lands" in *Land, Law, and Lordship*, 230-251.

⁶⁸⁷ Verumtamen circatores et inquisitores alienationum terrarum abbatiae Ramesensis vix unam cartam praedicti viri damnnum ecclesiae continentem possunt reperire. *CAR*, 334

⁶⁸⁸ This and all of Walter's alienations are listed in *CMR* ii, 270-272.

⁶⁸⁹ The text is unclear whether Michael is the "nepos" of Walter or of his "nepos," Geoffrey. "Gaufridus, nepos Abbatis, habet unam virgatam terrae. Michael, nepos ejus, dominicas decimas, cum ecclesia." *CMR* ii, 271.

received a half of a hide from Abbot Walter.⁶⁹⁰ He is also listed as a witness when Robert de Broy returned the manor of Crawley that he had seized from Ramsey.⁶⁹¹ Finally, in a list of tenants at Barton that probably dates to the time of Abbot William, William Travayl is listed as holding half a hide.⁶⁹² Nothing else appears of him. Another recipient William of Clara Valle received two virgates from Walter, one each at Upwood and Wistow, Huntingdonshire.⁶⁹³ A description of Upwood, likely from later in the twelfth century, notes that “Robert the father of William of Clara Valla held one virgate ... which virgate his son Hugh has.”⁶⁹⁴ This is followed by a comment that William, after the death of King Henry, gained from Abbot Walter “a free virgate and assart of nine acres and two acres of demesne where his house is.”⁶⁹⁵ There is no explanation of why Walter might grant William land, but he clearly was from a family involved with the Ramsey. In another case Roger Hostiarius may have received land for service as a doorman. He gained a hide in Houghton, Huntingdonshire, and his name suggests this rationale.⁶⁹⁶ This suggestion is speculative: he appears nowhere else in the cartulary or the *Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis*. On the other hand, Robert of Conington gained only a virgate in Elsworth, Cambridgeshire, but he, or someone of the same name, witnessed several charters.⁶⁹⁷ These included a purchase by Reginald, a grant by Reginald, two grants by Walter and Albreda’s charter.⁶⁹⁸ Aside from Robert’s service as a witness, there is no explanation for Walter’s grant of land to him. The opaque rationale behind this and so many of Walter’s grants may reflect their survival in this list of wrongs rather than in an abbatial charter that might explain a connection between recipient and abbot.

While many recipients were little known, some of those who received alienated lands from Abbot Walter can be connected to other documents and they often received larger grants. For example, Hugh de Beauchamp, who appears in Ramsey’s 1166 *carta*, gained the manor of Little Barford, Bedfordshire, which he held until the end of the century.⁶⁹⁹ A smaller but still considerable loss benefitted Oliver Monachus, a familiar name in the abbey’s

⁶⁹⁰ *CMR* ii., 271.

⁶⁹¹ *CMR* i, 257-258.

⁶⁹² *CMR* iii, 224-225.

⁶⁹³ *CMR* ii, 272.

⁶⁹⁴ “Robertus, pater Willelmi de Clara Valle, tenuit unam virgatam ... quam virgatam modo habet Hugo filius ejus.” *CMR* iii, 270.

⁶⁹⁵ “Unam virgatam liberam, et unum esartum de novem acris, et duas acras de dominio, ubi domus ejus est.” *CMR* iii, 270.

⁶⁹⁶ *CMR* ii, 271.

⁶⁹⁷ *CMR* ii, 272.

⁶⁹⁸ *CMR* i, 134, 152, 153, 156; ii, 260.

⁶⁹⁹ *VCH Bedfordshire*, ii, 207. The article erroneously reports that the initial alienation was made by Abbot Alwin whilst citing the list of Walter’s alienations from *CMR* ii, 272.

records, who acquired one and a quarter hides. Along the same lines was the loss to Henry of Whiston who gained assorted lands at Bythorn, Huntingdonshire.⁷⁰⁰ This is almost certainly the same Henry son of William of Whiston who received his father's lands from Ramsey some time during Reginald's abbacy in a charter recorded twice in the abbey's cartulary.⁷⁰¹ A Henry of Whiston also witnessed charters during both Reginald and Walter's prelaties.⁷⁰² An undated twelfth-century listing of tenants at Bythorn notes that "after the death of King Henry" Henry of Whiston held the lands of Heulard and Gocelin "for the same service."⁷⁰³ This record would suggest that although Walter's concession of the land may have been without the convent's assent, it did not materially worsen its land tenure since he continued to pay the same amount as was paid before. Henry's history and a potential explanation for Abbot Walter's grant of land to him also appear in the discussion of Woodwalton above. When considering this list of Walter's "uncanonical" alienations it seems that the abbot was largely making sensible decisions: he granted land to family members; small tenants who perhaps had some connection to the abbey; and a few more important land owners. These last grants may have been prudent oversight of the house's well-being if they were prompted by the desire to remain on good terms with powerful neighbours or were formalizing the seizure of lands during the time of war so the abbey did not lose all claim. In any case, this listing of grants fails to mark Walter out as a particularly pernicious prelate.

Nigel's land difficulties are harder to place chronologically as they occurred during Stephen's reign but continued whilst Henry II was king. Nigel's correction by the pope has been discussed in the context of earls wronging Ely, but it must be mentioned again in light of Nigel's role in the affair. By the early 1150s, Nigel had significant land problems, so significant in fact that Pope Eugenius III wrote the bishop to command him to work to regain lands lost under his, Hervey's, and Richard's leadership.⁷⁰⁴ Although Henry II's succession had restored Nigel to court, the bishop did not use this regained favor to restore all alienated lands of the church.⁷⁰⁵ From 1156 to 1158 correspondence concerning the bishop's carelessness towards his church's property passed between Pope Adrian IV, Nigel, Henry II,

⁷⁰⁰ Whiston is a variant of "Wincentone" in Northamptonshire. A. D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place-names*, (Oxford, 2011) [<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199609086.001.0001/acref-9780199609086-e-13889?rskey=3XLEgz&result=4>, accessed 5 December 2018]; The record lists "a hide, three hundred acres, and two 'culturas' " of demesne. *CMR* ii, 271. "Winchetone] Winchentona, Cott."

⁷⁰¹ *CMR* i, 136-137; 146; *CAR*, 259-260. The first record in the *CMR* has an abbreviated witness list.

⁷⁰² *CMR* i, 141; 146; 156 *bis*.

⁷⁰³ *CMR* iii, 313.

⁷⁰⁴ *LE*, ed Blake, bk. III, ch. 95, p. 344.

⁷⁰⁵ Graeme White, *Restoration and Reform* (Cambridge, 2000), 84. It may be that Nigel's role in restoring the Exchequer distracted him from pursuing these lands.

and Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury.⁷⁰⁶ In addition to naming those who held properties unlawfully, these letters suggest that Nigel was not merely permitting the despoliation of Ely, but even encouraging it.⁷⁰⁷ The named malefactors included some of England's most powerful magnates.⁷⁰⁸ Theobald wrote to Nigel that he had heard that the bishop had helped wrongdoers in taking lands from Ely.⁷⁰⁹ Nigel's cavalier approach to resuming the lands eventually led to his suspension. Following Henry's intervention and assuming Nigel's agreement to work on remedying wrongs, Adrian agreed to lift the punishment. This overview of Nigel's papal interaction shows that while he was not always indifferent to the lands of Ely, he did not see their inalienable unity as a necessary goal. According to the account shared in the *Liber Eliensis*, which is supported by the accompanying papal and archiepiscopal letters, the monks of Ely had good grounds to be frustrated by with their prelate's actions.

Neither Thorney nor Peterborough seem to have had the same difficulties with lands that Ramsey and Ely did. It may be that similar wrongs occurred but no record of them survives, but it is also possible that these abbots were not placed in situations that pressed them to alienate lands. Martin's abbey, although surrounded by troubles, had few direct dealings with them. Thorney was much smaller than its Benedictine neighbors and seems to have largely, though not entirely, escaped being targeted in the time of war. In the relatively pacific conditions at Thorney and Peterborough, the houses may never have been pressed for lands in the same way that Ramsey and Ely were.

There is only one account suggesting that Robert of Thorney misappropriated property. Late in the career of Abbot Robert, the church received the tithes of Roger of Stibbington with the approval of his lord, Fulk of Lisures.⁷¹⁰ The charter relaying this information is immediately followed by a large section of rubrication principally concerned with the death of Abbot Robert, his succession by Gilbert, Gilbert's demise, and Abbot Walter I's succession.⁷¹¹ However the rubrication begins by noting that Abbot Robert gave Roger of Stibbington's tithe to his chamberlain, Ingelram. The text does not specify whether or not the abbot had received the convent's approbation for this grant. The *Red Book* does not even contain a charter of donation from Abbot Robert. Perhaps this suggests that the gift was informal. Perhaps it means that Robert granted the tithes but died before a charter was

⁷⁰⁶ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 123-129, pp. 373-379.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 127, p. 376.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 127, p. 376.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 126, p. 375.

⁷¹⁰ *RB Thorney* ii, 420r

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*, 420r-v.

written. Possibly the scribe copying the *Red Book* refrained from including a charter because it had been superseded by a later charter that he did include. In any case, at some point during the abbacy of Walter I, 1154-1158, Ingelram, in the full chapter, gave the tithe into the hands of the new abbot who then reassigned it to Richard, described as “our clerk” who apparently had the church of Stibbington. This account suggests that even Robert, who seems to have been a well-regarded abbot, did not always follow the strictest probity in land tenure. Perhaps regardless of the situation a prelate would find it necessary or desirable to reward members of his household in a way that bothered the monks of his house.

The land distribution of the Fenland prelates suggest that although canon law demanded that a prelate retain lands rather than disperse them, some prelates chose to do otherwise. When assessing the censurable activities of the prelates of Stephen’s reign their uncanonical disposal of church lands would seem to be a significant problem. Further inspection suggests that Walter’s actions were largely explainable as was the one donation that Abbot Robert made. Only Nigel is left under particular condemnation. These conclusions seem to point to Nigel alone amongst the Fenland prelates as a significant impediment to the well-being of his monks.

Conclusion

This chapter presents the idea that the prelates who served during Stephen’s reign covered the range of normal business. They allocated revenues to monks and specifically to some obedientiaries; they were involved in troubles with their monks; and they fought on behalf of their houses in lawsuits against outside claims. However, a noteworthy conclusion is that although the prelates conducted “business as usual” during Stephen’s tumultuous reign, available dating places a large portion of their actions towards the beginning or end of Stephen’s reign. This may be explained in various ways. In Walter and Nigel’s case, the late 1130s and early 1140 were tumultuous times that saw them absent from their houses in undesirable circumstances. Robert, on the other hand, was abbot for many years before Stephen’s ascension and was no doubt able to settle outstanding questions long before 1135. Finally, Martin’s records from Peterborough are brief and merely note cases held in the abbot’s court. If Peterborough had a cartulary more like Thorney’s *Red Book* or Ramsey’s two cartularies, then perhaps more records of his actions would exist. These caveats notwithstanding, the years of Stephen’s reign, particularly the late 1130s and the 1140s, provide little datable evidence for these prelates’s actions. It then seems reasonable to

conclude that although not extinguishing governance altogether, the effects of the political instability and military action did inhibit some of the prelates' ability to function regularly. Nevertheless, the Fenland prelates did deal with problems. Perhaps based on their work both Martin and Walter must have been liked by significant members of their convents as evidenced by the narratives of their careers. Nigel inspired no such positive writings. Although disliked by the compiler of the *Liber Eliensis*, Nigel did have a *familia* that supported him, at least one member of whom later became a monk at Ely. It is possible the cathedral chapter did not have as absolute a feeling of antipathy towards Nigel as the *Liber Eliensis* represents. Stephen's reign was a challenging time for houses up and down England and perhaps no area was so hard hit as the Fens. At least one abbot, Martin, rose to the challenge, and the other prelates at the very least persisted through the darkest days. The Fenland prelates both helped and, on occasion, hindered their houses' well-being during the time of war; but their limited culpability cannot account for the suffering that the houses endured.

Chapter Four: The Fenland Houses after Stephen

Introduction

The main concern of this chapter is to consider the experience of the Fenland houses during the first twelve years of Henry II's reign. Three main reasons support this continuation. First, records from early in Henry II's reign illuminate the disruptions of Stephen's reign. Many of the wrongs that occurred during Stephen's reign appear only in sources from Henry II's time such as royal writs. Secondly, it would be impossible to judge Stephen's reign without appropriate comparators. If there is a notable difference in the extent of wrongdoing the monastic houses experienced between the two reigns, the contrast would add to an understanding of Stephen's reign. And finally, a majority of the narrative sources that originate from the Fenland houses, i.e. the Peterborough Chronicle and the local house histories, were composed during the early years of Henry II's reign. It is these narrative sources that most profoundly impact perceptions of the time period, even beyond legal recognition of wrongs. A study of the Fenland houses during the first dozen years of Henry II's reign will help this thesis provide a more well-rounded picture of the houses during Stephen's reign.

Thus, a thoughtful approach to the early years of Henry II's reign using both narrative and documentary sources can provide key insights to the following questions: After the death of Stephen were the houses freed from depredation altogether? How did Henry II interact with the houses in comparison with his predecessor? What did the houses need to do to recover from the events of Stephen's reign? In considering these questions this chapter will shift from previous ones in which sources it emphasizes. While it will continue to use prelatial charters and narrative sources, it will principally focus on the charters and writs of Henry II. Part of this change is practical. Fewer abbatial charters can be firmly dated 1155 x 1166 than 1135 x 1154 and the narrative material provide less detail. But necessity is only part of the rationale. Looking at the houses through the charters of Henry II reveals much about what they were experiencing. The charters resulted from actions taken by the houses to respond to the situation in which they found themselves. Thus they speak to both what the king was willing to do and what the houses wanted. Of course, such charters tell only the part of the story. Many exist saved in monastic cartularies and show what the monks themselves wanted to remember. Nonetheless, using royal charters supplemented by other sources can help show something of the Fenland monastic experience in the first twelve years of the reign of Henry II. Using the royal charters and other sources, this chapter will briefly consider who

led the houses, then take an in-depth look at what the charters of Henry II can tell us about the situation of the houses and his relationship with them, and finally comment on donations to the houses in the years 1154 to 1166.

The Heads of the Houses

The Fenland prelates were significant figures in the lives of their houses during the years following Stephen's death, but each monastic house had very different experiences of longevity amongst their heads.⁷¹² At Ely there was great stability as Nigel continued as bishop until his death in 1169. Ramsey and Peterborough each had one change. Walter continued at Ramsey until his death in 1160, and his successor William remained until 1178 when he left to become Abbot of Cluny. At Peterborough, Martin of Bec died soon after Stephen and was succeeded by William de Waterville who held the abbacy until being deposed in 1175. Thorney, on the other hand, suffered through a series of short-lived abbots from late in Stephen's reign. After Robert de Prunelai's lengthy abbacy of 1113-1151, Gilbert served as abbot for merely three years, 1151-1154; Walter I served for four, 1154-1158; Herbert also served for four, 1158-1162; and Walter II served for three, 1163-1169. Although Thorney had no historian who commented on the effect of such a turnover, it must have been somewhat disruptive to any programs that the abbey may have been undertaking. But the overall experience of the Fenland houses during the first years of Henry II's reign seems to be one of stability.

At Ely, Nigel remained in office throughout the first fifteen years of Henry II's reign. Although he returned to royal service, he remained deeply involved in Ely's affairs, as mentioned in the discussion above of earls and barons who wronged the house. Nigel did take action to help his house on occasion. Early under Henry II, Nigel came to agreement with Robert, Earl of Leicester regarding a certain *brocna*, which Karn suggests was "a marsh or fen."⁷¹³ In another grant, dating 1158 x 1169, Nigel gave a tree trunk every week to the infirmary.⁷¹⁴ This donation bears mentioning because when Nigel instituted his division between bishop and convent at least two decades earlier, he specified that the monks were to hold Somersham wood as they did under his predecessor, but this donation calls for the trunk

⁷¹² Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 60, 62, 74-75. Thorney then had no abbot until 1176 when Solomon began his long abbacy until 1193.

⁷¹³ *EEA* 31, no. 39.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 46. Karn suggests that Nigel's gift was a temporary aid to the building of a new infirmary. He places it with no. 45, Hubert of Ditton's grant to the infirmary.

to come “from our wood of Somersham.”⁷¹⁵ This apparent contrast suggests either that the bishop (or abbot earlier) shared the wood with the monks or that Nigel had taken back the wood from the monks. It seems more plausible that the wood was shared as the *Liber* does not mention an act of seizing their wood amongst its catalogue of Nigel’s wrongs, and it would be unlike the *Liber* to pass over criticizing Nigel. In either case, at this late point in his career, Nigel made a useful grant to the monks. Nigel did not seem overly concerned with providing for the monks under his care, but he did, according to the sources, periodically provide help and support. Towards the very end of his prelacy Nigel issued letters in which he sought to restore Ely’s possessions from people who held them, namely the Glanvill family, the Mountchesneys, and Adam of Cockfield.⁷¹⁶ Once again, Nigel was somewhat active on behalf of his house. Although the *Liber Eliensis* complains about Nigel even after he had died, he at least occasionally occupied himself on the monks’s behalf.

William Anglicus, who followed Walter at Ramsey, receives surprisingly little mention in histories and chronicles despite his impressive career. Before taking on the abbacy of Ramsey in 1160, William was the prior of the Cluniac house of Saint Martin des Champs in Paris.⁷¹⁷ He then served at Ramsey until 1177 when he was elected as Abbot of Cluny itself, but this illustrious tenure was short-lived. William died in 1180 after having served in Cluny for only two years.⁷¹⁸

During his seventeen years at Ramsey, William left little mark on the house records. He shows up in several lists in the cartulary concerning lands and holdings. For example, he is listed as the donor of eight small holdings included in later tenant lists.⁷¹⁹ William also oversaw a list of knights and hidages that was perhaps a working draft of the 1166 carta.⁷²⁰ The cartulary also includes a brief list of alienations that William made.⁷²¹ At the end of the cartulary, the editors included several documents from a different Ramsey MS.⁷²² The additional information repeats the knights and hidage list in more detail.⁷²³ It also repeats the list of William’s alienations and includes both a short list of illegal seizures of lands and a list

⁷¹⁵ The original division was in *EEA* 31, no. 31. No. 46 records “unum truncum de nemore nostro de Somersham.”

⁷¹⁶ *EEA* 31, nos. 49, 50, and 53.

⁷¹⁷ Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 62.

⁷¹⁸ Robert of Torigny, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, vol. iv, ed. Richard Howlett (London, 1889). 287-289.

⁷¹⁹ *CMR* ii, 26-27; iii, 242, 244, 249, 253, 258, 262, and 272.

⁷²⁰ *CMR* iii 48-49.

⁷²¹ *CMR* ii, 274-275.

⁷²² *CMR* iii, 218ff. Documents taken from BL Cotton Galba E. X.

⁷²³ *CMR* iii, 218-220; *RB Exchequer* i, pp. 370-372. Hart and Lyons misdated the hidage to after William’s abbacy. The second and more complete of the two inquisitions into hidage and knight service in the printed *CMR* was taken from a different thirteenth-century manuscript, Cotton Galba E. X.

of increases in abbey lands.⁷²⁴ Following one of these lists, it also adds lands unjustly held against the abbey and new gains. In addition to these lists, William appears in a handful of other records. Perhaps the most significant transactions for the abbey's finances involving William were Geoffrey de Mandeville's donation on behalf of his father and Robert Foliot's donation for himself.⁷²⁵ Each benefitted the abbey by 100 s. Another document in which William appears is dated sometime between 1163 and 1178. In this letter, Bishop Gilbert Foliot, having been delegated by the pope, announces his judgment in favor of Ramsey and Abbot William in a case of advowson in Burnham Deepdale, Norfolk.⁷²⁶ Although Foliot's letter may well postdate this study it demonstrates that the abbey and its abbot struggled against wrongful claims well into the reign of Henry II.

The dating of William's actions at Ramsey is a particular problem for this study. With the exception of the actions of Geoffrey II de Mandeville, none of the mentions of Abbot William can be dated 1160 x 1166. Since his abbacy continued until *c.* 1177, these might represent actions well past 1166. Nonetheless, these records should be considered because they shed light on his time in office and may well cover events before 1166. Inasmuch as the documents correspond with other accounts of the Fens from 1154-1166, they will be considered.

The key record is the listing of William's alienations that both the cartulary and the Cotton MS place immediately following Abbot Walter's alienations.⁷²⁷ In the six cases of alleged alienation, four involved family members, one favoured Sawtry Abbey, a Cistercian house founded by Earl Simon de Senlis in 1147, and one concerned a virgate of land in Brancaster, Norfolk.⁷²⁸ In at least three cases, William acted on situations raised under the previous abbot. The case of Woodwalton, Huntingdonshire, in which he arranged the marriage of his brother to the widow of a knight wrongfully in possession has been discussed above. The cartulary also notes that William married his niece to Ralph, a knight of Therfield, Hertfordshire, who was apparently the nephew of Abbot Walter.⁷²⁹ Although this marriage may not have created a new alienation of abbey lands, it tied William to the controversial behavior of his predecessor. William's sale of a virgate in Brancaster, Norfolk,

⁷²⁴ *CMR* iii, 223-229. Hart and Lyons consider that the lists of lands seized and increased are likely to date from William's abbacy, but the dating is uncertain.

⁷²⁵ *CMR* i, 153; ii, 196-197.

⁷²⁶ *CMR* ii, 192-193; Gilbert Foliot, *The Letters and Charters of Gilbert Foliot Abbot of Gloucester (1139-49) Bishop of Hereford (1148-63 and London (1163-87)*, eds., Z. N. Brooke, Dom Adrian Morey, and C. N. L. Brooke (Cambridge, 1967), no. 429.

⁷²⁷ *CMR* ii, 274-275; iii, 223-224.

⁷²⁸ *CMR* ii, 275.

⁷²⁹ *CMR* ii, 270, 275.

to Herbert the Provost must relate to Abbot Walter's allowing a Herbert and his brother to have the monks' pasture between Brancaster and Docking, Norfolk.⁷³⁰ However William's actions in this sale are inexplicable from the limited record of the cartulary. It states that "he sold to Herbert the Provost a virgate of land for forty marks after the expulsion of two sons of a certain dead man to whom [the sons] the inheritance pertained."⁷³¹ The connection to a tenant set up by Walter does not explain the high cost of the land or the violence associated with the grant. Perhaps the author of the list neglected to include explanatory information. As recorded, the sale would scarcely withstand legal scrutiny.

In short, considering William's lengthy tenure at Ramsey, it seems as though he did not abuse his rights wildly. He favored family members four times, but even then it was largely in continuing a wrong from a previous abbacy that might have been hard to reverse. It is perhaps in William's favor that the title of the chapter listing his alienations does not mention any lack of approval from the convent. Whilst this might just be an oversight, both the previous chapters relating Walter's wrongs draw the reader's attention to his uncanonical behavior in not merely making alienations but in doing so without gaining his monks' approval. In the case of William, it may be that the monks acceded to his decisions despite disliking the continuing alienations. Though technically they consented, they ensured that their displeasure was noted in the abbey's records. Despite these continued losses, Ramsey was enjoying peace under a new abbot and a new king.

Almost as soon as England had a new king, Peterborough had a new abbot. He was a man pleasing to both the chapter and the king, at least when chosen. Very early in Henry II's reign, Martin of Bec died and was replaced by William de Waterville in an internally-run process overseen by Hugh Candidus.⁷³² The abbey followed this uncommon arrangement in order to present a unified front to Henry II when offering him their new abbot as a fait accompli. The monks were also canny enough to ensure a pick that the king might be likely to approve, a former clerk of his.⁷³³ Hugh Candidus reported that Henry II permitted the monastery's internal choice to stand and showed his approval of their choice of his former

⁷³⁰ *CMR* ii, 271.

⁷³¹ "Vendidit Herberto Praeposito unam virgatum terrae, expulsis duobus filiis cujusdam hominis defuncti, quibus hereditas pertinuit." *CMR* ii, 275; *CMR* iii, 223.

⁷³² *HC*, ed. Mellows, 124-127

⁷³³ Hugh's identification of William as a former clerk of Henry's lacks corroboration, yet there is no evidence against such a claim, and choosing a candidate likely to please the new king who was also a member of the community seems a likely choice for a prudent abbey. *RRAN* iii, xxxiv; Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses* 2nd ed., 60; William de Waterville does not appear in T. A. M. Bishop, *Scriptores Regis* (Oxford, 1961). Graeme White accepts Hugh's assertion of William's former occupation and associates an anti-Stephen bias in the Final Continuation of Hugh's chronicle with the abbey's new head. Graeme J. White, "The Myth of the Anarchy," *Anglo-Norman Studies* XXII, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 2000), 325.

clerk by a charter that will be addressed below. William de Waterville remained abbot of Peterborough for the next two decades.

At the end of his abbacy, William de Waterville was praised by Hugh Candidus' chronicle.⁷³⁴ In addition to founding a dependent female priory at Stamford, the abbot acquired a number of pieces of land, oversaw many building projects, settled Abbot Martin's debts, and oversaw the righting of at least two wrongs dating back to Stephen's reign.⁷³⁵ Details of these two wrongs are ill supplied by Hugh's chronicle or elsewhere.⁷³⁶ The chronicle is not altogether cheerful about William's time as abbot. He was "impeded by great misfortune" which led to him being eventually and undeservedly deposed at the king's desire in 1175.⁷³⁷ Unfortunately both the good and the bad of William's reign are undated except for his final removal. Despite the vague dating, the chronicle records that the first two decades of Henry II's reign were in general a good time for Peterborough Abbey. On the other hand the loose dating means that the benefits of William's abbacy cannot necessarily be assigned to the period before 1166.⁷³⁸ But when considering Peterborough in the first dozen years of Henry II's reign the overall picture is one of growth and prosperity.

Meanwhile, at Thorney, the 1150s and 1160s were an unstable time for their leadership. After the long-ruling Abbot Robert died in 1151, no fewer than four abbots succeeded him by the end of 1163. The first, still during Stephen's reign, was a monk of the abbey, Gilbert. His short tenure, 1151-1154, saw little recorded abbatial action. The next abbot, Walter I, was also a monk of Thorney who according to the *Red Book* gained the abbacy in "the first year of King Henry II."⁷³⁹ In the section rubricated as Walter I, Thorney's *Red Book* includes five accounts of actions that benefitted the house as lands that were apparently subject to questionable ownership were quitclaimed to the abbey.⁷⁴⁰ It seems as though Walter was effective at resuming the abbey's lands. Of course, he might have been aided by a king who was generally favorable to a restoration of the status quo before Stephen.

⁷³⁴ Mellow's noted that "as [Hugh] died under [William's] abbacy, the final paragraph about the deposition of the abbot cannot be entirely due to Hugh." *HC*, ed. Mellows, xvii.

⁷³⁵ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 127-131.

⁷³⁶ Neither are clear in charters of Henry II. The fee and service of Geoffrey de la Mare was likely recovered based on later mentions of the family as constables. King, *Peterborough*, 34. Confirmation of the nine knights held by Earl Simon is nowhere mentioned but Henry II did offer general support to Peterborough for its knights and associated services. *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2038.

⁷³⁷ "Prepeditus esset magnis infortuniis" *HC*, ed. Mellows, 131-132; The author thought the case unproved.

⁷³⁸ Even the promising inclusion of knight fees resumed cannot be compared with Peterborough's *carta* because that document only gives an overview of knight service owed and fails to list the knights on the abbey's land. *RB Exchequer* i, 329.

⁷³⁹ *RB Thorney* ii, 420v.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 420v-421r. (1) quitclaim of Robert fitz Aubrey camerarius of Twywell – 420v (2) quitclaim of Andrew Revel of Folkesworth land – 420v-421r (3) quitclaim of Henry de Merch of the advowson of Sibson church – 421r (4) settlement of land that Abbot Robert gave to Ingelram (5) Walter de Broi land to Thorney – 421r

This connection is clear in the case of Robert fitz Aubrey which will be discussed below. Only one of the cases, that of the Broi family discussed above and in chapter 2, has clear ties to the unrest during Stephen's reign. Taken together the records connected to Walter I seem to show that the abbey needed to restore full possession of its lands in several cases. Considering its relatively small endowment, the loss of even bits of estates would weigh heavily upon Thorney. Walter I seems to have been diligent in strengthening his house.

When Walter died four years later he was followed by Herbert, a monk of St. Nicholas, Angers. Although this suggests Henry II took a role in replacing Walter I by nominating a monk from a foundation connected to the royal family, the new abbot may have merely been viewed as a local choice. St Nicholas, Angers, had ties to the Fens through its dependent priory in Spalding, Lincolnshire, which was under a prior named Herbert in the 1150s.⁷⁴¹ Although the *Red Book* does not specifically name Abbot Herbert as having come from Spalding, it is possible that he did. For example, when recording the arrival of Robert de Prunelai the *Red Book* merely notes that he was a monk of St Evroult.⁷⁴² While that is true, immediately before moving to Thorney, Robert had served as Prior of Noyon.⁷⁴³ A Herbert is recorded as prior of Spalding in several charters of Bishop Robert de Chesney from the Spalding Cartulary, dated 1148 x 1161.⁷⁴⁴ It seems reasonable then that the Prior of Spalding was later the Abbot of Thorney, so that rather than bringing in a new monk from Angers to head a relatively small abbey, a competent prior was promoted to an abbacy some fourteen miles south.

The Thorney evidence does not tell us who initially wanted Herbert to become the house's abbot. Either the monks of Thorney or Henry II may have been behind the choice. Thorney was considerably less important than the neighboring houses of Ely, Ramsey and Peterborough. Therefore Henry may have been pleased to accept their choice of abbot as he did when Peterborough selected their own abbot. On the other hand the king may have chosen to favor a monk from a foundation associated with his family. Despite the interesting question of where Herbert came from and how he was selected, Herbert's abbacy was not particularly influential. The *Red Book* lists only one charter under his name in the section on abbatial charters. In it, he and the whole convent grant one virgate in Yaxley for an annual rent of 6 s.⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴¹ Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 109.

⁷⁴² *RB Thorney*, 415v.

⁷⁴³ Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 75.

⁷⁴⁴ *EEA* 1, nos. 247, 248, and 255.

⁷⁴⁵ *RB Thorney* ii, 421v.

Thorney's pattern of short-lived abbots continued throughout the 1160s. After Herbert died in 1162, Walter II, a monk and prior of Ramsey, succeeded him in 1163 and lived until 1169.⁷⁴⁶ The *Red Book* lists no charters under his record. Once again, there is no sign that an abbot of Thorney influenced the house very much.

In ending this short study of the heads of the Fenland houses through 1166, a few conclusions can be drawn. With the notable exception of Thorney, the houses enjoyed general stability of leadership. There are few recorded problems arising during this time. Although the monks of Ely continued to dislike Nigel, he caused no significant difficulties for them. Ramsey enjoyed enough good governance under William Anglicus that the cartulary could find only five specifics to complain about. William de Waterville had troubles during his abbacy, but they seem not to have affected Peterborough. The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus has only good to say about him and it records significant improvements in the abbey's possessions. All in all the narrative records of the abbots and bishop suggest that the period or 1154 to 1166 was fairly stable time for the houses. At least some old problems were dealt with and no major new ones arose. When considering the tenures of the Fenland prelates one significant contrast can be noted between the reigns of Stephen and Henry II. Although both kings had quarrels with prelates, Henry II's disagreement with William de Waterville did not result in significant problems at Peterborough.

Writs and Charters of Henry II

Settling problems is a common subject in the major sources for this chapter, the many charters and writs of Henry II. As ever, twelfth-century charters, even those of the king, are challenging to date precisely. Dating for many of these charters can be narrowed down to within only a decade. For example, a large number can be dated based upon the presumption that the *Dei gratia* clause was not used before 1173.⁷⁴⁷ Nicholas Vincent places some charters, which can only be loosely dated 1155 x 1172, at the beginning of Henry's reign because their content – Henry offering help to a house in order that it enjoy its position as in the days of Henry I – urges an early dating.⁷⁴⁸ This method risks circular argument: charters offering help must date to early in Henry II's reign and thus early in Henry's reign

⁷⁴⁶ Knowles, et al., *Heads of Houses*, 2nd ed., 75.

⁷⁴⁷ Léopold Delisle, "Les Formules Rex Anglorum et Dei Gratia Rex Anglorum" in *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, 68 (1907), 528; Poole, Reginald L. "The Dates of Henry II's Charters" *English Historical Review*, 23 (Jan., 1908), 79-83.

⁷⁴⁸ E. g. *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, nos. 827, 828, 2615, and 2616.

monasteries needed help. Yet Vincent generally provides a defense for dating anomalies and this thesis will accept his edition's arguments for dating unless otherwise noted.

Before commenting on the contents of Henry II's charters in relationship to the Fenland houses in detail, a brief overview of the charters is required. Seventy-one charters for the houses can be dated with some certainty to 1155 x 1166. Of these, twenty-five charters or thirty-five percent were granted on behalf of Thorney. Ramsey received the next most with twenty-two charters; Peterborough had fourteen, and Ely had only ten, a mere fourteen percent. This breakdown does not reflect the size of the abbeys: Ely was the largest and Thorney the smallest. Yet despite the varying numbers of charters concerning them, the houses benefitted from the same sorts of royal charters, such as those dealing with confirmations of lands and rights, and royal writs protecting and defending them.

Two broad themes run through the writs and charters. First, the houses could rely upon the king to protect them. Of course the documents were the result of the abbey's solicitation and should side with them. Yet compared to the scarcity of Stephen's charters, Henry II's show that he is available to defend the monasteries of the Fens. Secondly, Henry and the abbeys wanted to restore the status quo ante bellum. Everything should go back to the days of Henry I when law and order covered the land of England. Both these themes will become apparent when looking at vast number of the charters and their language.

Confirmation

Henry II's confirmation charters and writs provided the broadest support for houses seeking assurance that the new king would uphold their privileges, rights, and possessions. For example, sometime likely between 1155 and 1158, Henry issued a writ to all his justices, sheriffs, and servants which directs that the Abbot of Thorney was to have his holdings without trouble just as on the day that Henry I was alive and dead.⁷⁴⁹ The writ also offers general support for Thorney against any wrongs suffered by the abbey while allowing that there might be claims against the abbey. The writ then advises that in the case of further claims the abbot should do justice for the claimant in his court.⁷⁵⁰ This provision ensured that Thorney did not face an unfavorable court. The generic nature of Henry's writ which fails to mention any specific problems that Thorney experienced, provided Thorney a means of

⁷⁴⁹ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2627. As with many other writs and charters, this writ is not datable closer than 1155 x April 1172, however, the edition reasonably proposes that it should be placed early in Henry's reign.

⁷⁵⁰ "Si aliquis de eadem ecclesia tenere clamauerit, abbas ei rectum in curia sua teneat." *Chart Ibid.*, no. 2627. Translation aided by Dr Sarah White.

threatening those who were unjustly occupying their lands without bringing about a specific suit and suggests that the abbey wanted blanket support for all their holdings and specifically support against any wrongs occurring during Stephen's reign. Henry II's writ also serves to underline his delegitimization of Stephen's reign. The writ ignores Stephen in the same way that Domesday routinely ignores Harold by instead focusing on the day Edward the Confessor was living and dead. Both William the Conqueror and Henry II preferred to pass over their predecessors in silence rather than memorialize them in writing.

Ramsey Abbey benefitted from a writ similar to Thorney's although it can be dated with certainty to between 1155 and August 1158.⁷⁵¹ The Ramsey writ differs from the one favoring Thorney in that it addresses "justices, sheriffs, and all the faithful of all England," but it shares a similar reference to the day Henry I was alive and dead. It also mentions explicitly that wrong may have been done to the abbey during the war and demands that lands that were either given without the convent's consent or seized be returned to Ramsey's lordship.⁷⁵² This writ was tailored to the specifics of Ramsey's experience during Stephen's reign, although it, like the Thorney writ, names no specific wrongs to be righted. While the writ could easily have referenced specifics of Ramsey's case, the language seems to have simply been a general support for the abbey that covered any and all wrongs.

Of course, Henry did not intervene only on behalf of the smaller houses or those notorious for their suffering. He issued a writ concerning Ely that offered it general support as well.⁷⁵³ This writ, addressed generally to the justiciars and sheriffs of all England, commands that the monks of Ely are to hold their lands and possessions as they did on the day that Henry I was alive and dead. The combination of the writ's reference specifically to the monks, "praecipio quod monachi de Ely," and its exclusion of the bishop led E. O. Blake to associate this charter with the vacancy following the death of Nigel in 1169, but this conclusion is not the only plausible position.⁷⁵⁴ Henry II may have been responding specifically to concerns from the monks of Ely. Nigel's role in Henry II's administration would have afforded him political clout to fight whatever tenurial battles he desired, but he was not consistently concerned in the monks' land as shown by the necessity of Adrian IV's intervention on their behalf in 1156.⁷⁵⁵ Two arguments suggest that the writ was more likely to date to the early years of Henry II's reign rather than to the Ely vacancy after Nigel's

⁷⁵¹ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2124. Becket witnessed the writ as chancellor.

⁷⁵² "Per guerram." *Ibid.*, no. 2124.

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*, no. 827.

⁷⁵⁴ *LE*, ed. Blake, p. 408.

⁷⁵⁵ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 123-125, pp. 373-374.

death. First, it is similar in substance to those of Thorney and Ramsey, despite the reference in them to an abbot.⁷⁵⁶ Second, the absence of a mentioned bishop can be seen as proof that the bishop himself required no help, not that there was no bishop at that time.

Another plausible argument which might seem to suggest that this writ was granted during a vacancy is the reference to the abbey being in the king's hand, "quia ipsi et omnes res sue sunt in manu mea et custodia."⁷⁵⁷ However, Henry II's documentation uses similar wording merely to show the king's role in protecting religious houses.⁷⁵⁸ For example in the last third of his reign, Henry II issued a charter-writ in favor of "the abbot and Premonstratensian canons of Blanchelande" that they be quit of shires, hundreds, and other burdens for its manor of Cammeringham, Lincolnshire.⁷⁵⁹ He generally ordered his archbishops, bishops, etc. that they watch over the abbey and its manor and explained "quia ipsi et omnia sua sunt in manu et custodia et protectione mea..." Evidently Henry's "hand and custody" benefit for a house did not necessarily preclude it from having a prelate. This is also true in the case of the cathedral chapter of Angers and its bishop as well as the Benedictine abbey of Bardney.⁷⁶⁰ This argument being accepted, Henry II's writ benefitting Ely's monks in no way stands out from the similar writs for Thorney and Ramsey. Instead it seems as though Henry II was again affording the monks a blanket protection.

Oddly, there is no parallel writ for Peterborough in which Henry offers general protection. This may be due to the vagaries of survival. Alternatively, the lack of a writ for Peterborough may be connected with the death of Martin of Bec and his succession by William de Waterville so early in Henry's reign. According to Hugh Candidus, after Martin's death the monks quickly acted to select their own abbot and, with Hugh as a key actor, chose William de Waterville, a former clerk of king's.⁷⁶¹ Hugh, the prior Reinald, and the abbot-elect William presented Henry II and Archbishop Theobald with a *fait accompli* at Oxford, and Henry allowed the election to stand. Hugh's record states that Henry "confirmed by his charter the gift of the abbey to the aforementioned William."⁷⁶² Unfortunately, this confirmation, if it existed, is not extant. On the surface it seems odd that the abbey would have failed to copy the charter into their records, but there are several explanations. First, charters associated with William de Waterville's abbacy are surprisingly sparse in the

⁷⁵⁶ "Precipio quod abb(as)..." *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, nos. 2124 and 2627.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 827.

⁷⁵⁸ E. g. *Ibid.*, nos. 43 and 86.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 243.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, nos. 56 and 95.

⁷⁶¹ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 123-127.

⁷⁶² "Abbaciam predicto Willelmo donandam carta sua confirmavit." *Ibid.*, 126.

Peterborough cartularies of the early and mid thirteenth century. Furthermore once he was no longer abbot the charter might seem unnecessary to retain. Finally only five abbatial confirmation charters of Henry II are found in Holt and Vincent's edition.⁷⁶³ Given these facts, the lack of a copied charter seems less striking. Of course, it is possible that Hugh's history is inaccurate about what really occurred and no charter was given, or the house deliberately suppressed the royal charter, but these arguments seem both unlikely and improvable. The more likely conclusion is that Henry's charter granting William de Waterville the abbey included a general protection as do the charters mentioned above and that when the cartularies were assembled a charter in favor of a former abbot would not be a high priority to include since it would have been superseded. Alternatively the king could have granted William a confirmation charter and issued a writ favoring the abbey as well, and both documents were lost from the record. Finally, there is always the possibility that Peterborough never sought a general writ of protection, but instead gained charters tailored to specific needs. In any case, the lack of recorded writ offering general protection for Peterborough does not seem to signify any difference of relationship between that house and the king. There are sufficient other extant charters discussed below to show that Henry II had a similar relationship to Peterborough as to the other Fenland houses.

New Abbots

Henry II also interacted with the abbeys when they needed new abbot, but few charters granting abbacies are extant. This is noticeable in the case of William de Waterville, mentioned above.⁷⁶⁴ Although Hugh's chronicle records that he was the subject of a confirmation charter, no such charter remains.

Similarly, despite the fact that Thorney saw three new abbots during the first decade of Henry's reign, only one notification of his granting the abbey is extant. Sometime during 1155 to August 1158, although presumably in early 1155, Henry granted the abbey to Walter, a monk of Thorney.⁷⁶⁵ The notification writ, similarly to that of other grants of religious houses, refers to categories of lands and holdings rather than naming any. Since it does not refer to any problems, little can be read into this writ regarding the state of the abbey so soon after the end of Stephen's reign. Nor is the form of the writ particularly enlightening. The

⁷⁶³ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, nos. 15, Abingdon; 106 and 108, Barking; 1133, Glendalough; and 2609, Thorney. The Glendalough charter may well be spurious. The first three use the wording "Sciatis me concessisse et dedisse ..." whilst Thorney's reads only "Sciatis me concessisse ..." Perhaps this suggests the convent chose him, but the small sampling makes it hard to consider the question.

⁷⁶⁴ See above pages 142-143.

⁷⁶⁵ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2609.

notification itself is quite similar to the one issued by Henry II when he gave the abbey of Abingdon to Walkelin in 1159.⁷⁶⁶ Since so few charters granting monasteries remain and these two are quite similar, the writ for Abbot Walter II of Thorney can perhaps be presumed to be a fairly typical grant of abbey.

In finishing this section on Henry's confirmation charters, a few conclusions can be drawn. First, Henry II wanted badly to associate his decisions with those of his grandfather. This is evident as the era of Henry I was the most common point of reference in Henry's charters. Second, in his own day, Henry II seemed pleased to help the abbeys' prosperity by confirming grants helping their daily business. As a result, the impression given by these confirmations is that of a peaceful kingdom in which the king ensures that the monasteries enjoy their traditional rights and privileges in order to fulfill their work.

Specific Confirmations

Henry II also granted more narrowly focused writs or charters that confirmed a house's rights in specific cases. Although these do not directly refer to Stephen's reign, his time as king is constantly noted when Henry II's charters mention the time of his grandfather Henry I. These charters and writs do not call for a specified wrong to be addressed, but their existence may imply that rights were constrained during Stephen's reign. Of course, houses may simply have been seeking confirmation of rights under the imprimatur of the present king as a safeguard. In either case, the writs and charters remind the reader of a change between the reigns of Henry II and his predecessor.

Several charters dealt with abbatial rights to lands or judicial rights for which the house paid an annual rent to the king. For example, early in his reign, Henry II told the sheriff of Huntingdonshire that Ramsey was to hold the farm of Hurstingstone Hundred, Huntingdonshire, for an annual payment of four marks.⁷⁶⁷ Although this notification does not specifically mention Henry I, it reproduces verbatim one of Henry I's charters dating to the second half of his reign.⁷⁶⁸ The only difference is in the greeting and the witness list. Possibly at the same time as the Hurstingstone charter, Henry II informed the justices, sheriff, barons, and all his faithful men of Huntingdonshire that he had confirmed to Abbot Walter possession of the manor of King's Ripton, Huntingdonshire, for an annual fee of £8.⁷⁶⁹ This

⁷⁶⁶ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 15.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 2121.

⁷⁶⁸ *RRAN* ii, no. 1632; *CAR*, 226.

⁷⁶⁹ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2122. Both charters were issued at Lincoln and share two of three witnesses.

charter fully reproduces the language of Henry I. In addition, it inserts a comment referring back to the initial charter of donation, “just as my grandfather Henry granted to him and confirmed by his charter.”⁷⁷⁰ This difference between the two confirmations of Henry II in which he invokes his grandfather in one and does not in the other, may be explained by two charters of Stephen.⁷⁷¹ In the first, Stephen had confirmed Henry I’s grant of the Hundred at four marks per annum. In the second, he exceeded Henry I’s grant and gave the manor to Ramsey in alms for the good of the souls of Henry I, himself, his wife and child, and the well-being of the entire country. When Henry II confirmed Ramsey’s farm of Hurstingstone Hundred he merely continued the status quo; whereas when confirming King’s Ripton, he was undoing the grant of his predecessor and seems to have invoked the support of his grandfather’s charter as he tacitly set aside Stephen’s largesse. This attempt to erase Stephen’s action draws attention to the fact that although Henry II provided a ready source of writs and charters for monastic houses during his reign, Stephen did not altogether neglect the well-being of English monks. Nonetheless, as the high number of Henry II’s charters shows, the first Angevin king offered substantial support for the monks of his domains. The monks could obtain protection in writing for anything they had a claim to, and many charters from Henry II would remind the monks how he was restoring the justice they had enjoyed under his grandfather.

Another case supports the idea that Henry II referred to his grandfather particularly when counteracting Stephen. Early in his reign, Henry II confirmed the grant of Normancross Hundred, Huntingdonshire, to Thorney Abbey for 100 shillings per annum.⁷⁷² The notification charter of this grant fails to refer to Henry I, although he had made the original donation.⁷⁷³ However, in this case, Henry II was not altering any grant of Stephen’s.⁷⁷⁴ Since the monks were simply receiving a reaffirmation of their rights, there was no need to underscore the ties to Henry I.

Moving on from hundredal rights to other financial benefits, Henry II confirmed freedom of tolls and associated fees for three of the four houses. For something as straightforward as a confirmation of freedom of tolls and other fees, Henry’s charters are slightly complicated for the dates covered in this study. The clearest example is his writ

⁷⁷⁰ *RRAN* ii, no. 1960; *CAR*, 283-284. “sicut rex H(enricus) auus meus ei concessit et carta sua confirmavit.” *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2122.

⁷⁷¹ *RRAN* iii, nos. 669 (Hurstingstone) and 667 (King’s Ripton).

⁷⁷² 1155 x August 1158. *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2618.

⁷⁷³ *RRAN* ii, no. 1028 and LXXXII; *RB Thorney* i, 19r.

⁷⁷⁴ Stephen’s only mention of Normancross related to passage-fee on the road, not the hundred itself. *RRAN* iii, nos. 889-890.

regarding Ramsey from very early in his reign.⁷⁷⁵ In this document Henry ordered his sheriffs and servants throughout England that the monks and men of Ramsey be quit of toll and custom wherever and whenever they were conducting the abbey's business. This writ merely repeats a charter of his grandfather's verbatim.⁷⁷⁶

Henry II's writ in favor of Thorney concerning tolls and customs also dates to early in his reign.⁷⁷⁷ Despite some irregularities in the writ, Vincent persuasively defends its authenticity since an original has survived and the scribe's hand places him at the king's court. In addition, the writ closely follows the wording of a Henry I charter as recorded in the *Red Book of Thorney*.⁷⁷⁸ One difference between the two is that Henry I addressed his writ to his sheriffs and servants whilst Henry II's greets all his faithful [ones] and men of England. This difference defends the Henry I charter against a charge that it was invented and inserted into the *Red Book* to prove greater antiquity of this liberty. Had the monks so desired they would likely have copied Henry II's charters exactly under Henry I's name and only changed the witnesses and the place; however, the variation suggests that the charter was genuinely given by Henry I and the odd language of the body, but not the address clause, was later copied into the charter of Henry II confirming his grandfather's grant. Thus Henry II's charter should be taken as genuine. The exact wording of this writ appears in a larger writ he issued for Thorney in which he dealt with four topics: the market at Yaxley, rights in Stamford, Lincolnshire, rights in Witchford Hundred, Cambridgeshire, and the current issue of toll.⁷⁷⁹ In addition to the same wording about tolls and customs, the witnesses and place of issue are identical. Perhaps Thorney obtained from Henry the more specific writ to deal with a particular issue and had it included in the larger and more general charter as for ease of archiving.

A third writ regarding tolls and fees does not compare directly with those to Thorney and Ramsey because it does not extend to an entire abbey. Sometime during 1156 to 1162 Henry II informed his justices, sheriffs and servants throughout England that he was granting that all goods relating to the sacrist of Peterborough be quit of tolls, passage fees, bridge fees, and customs.⁷⁸⁰ This grant is not paralleled in any extant charter of Henry I, although that king did grant freedom of toll to the household goods of the abbot himself.⁷⁸¹ The more

⁷⁷⁵ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2123.

⁷⁷⁶ *RRAN* ii, no. 1057a; *CAR*, 278.

⁷⁷⁷ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2608.

⁷⁷⁸ *RRAN* ii, no. 1981; *Red Book* 19r, "e."

⁷⁷⁹ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2610.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 2041.

⁷⁸¹ *RRAN* ii, no. 1750.

probable source of Henry II's generosity is the actions of Abbot Martin who worked to establish the sacristy as a semi-independent obedientiary.⁷⁸² Although Martin's death followed Henry's accession too quickly to propose the abbot as the direct agent of this writ, it seems likely that his actions set up the sacristy in a position in which it, perhaps through the new abbot, could request royal favor. In addition, the Peterborough sacristy writ is narrow, but Henry II also quit the abbey more generally of all tolls, passage, pontage and custom for its demesne goods.⁷⁸³ This second writ of Henry II in favor of Peterborough quite possibly postdates the timespan covered by this thesis. Based on its witnesses this writ is placed between 1165 and 1173. Nevertheless, it is worthy of mention because it resembles the first two writs discussed, which favored Ramsey and Thorney. Henry II's confirmation of freedom from tolls for the Fenland houses corresponds to his treatment of other houses.⁷⁸⁴ These charters in favor of Thorney, Ramsey, and Peterborough can principally be read as evidence of Henry II conducting normal business throughout his lands, particularly throughout the first decade or so of his reign, since the king was not only largely confirming the actions of his grandfather for the Fenland houses, but also dealing similarly with houses throughout England and Normandy. During the beginning of Henry II's reign the Fenland houses experienced problems of trade and tolls, and they were able to gain the necessary help from the king when their rights were threatened.

In the case of a somewhat uncommon liberty, Henry II confirmed Ramsey's possession of the *leuga* granting the house extensive rights in its immediate vicinity.⁷⁸⁵ This charter, addressed to the bishop of Lincoln and the barons of Huntingdonshire, lists the rights and adds that Ramsey enjoys "all other liberties pertaining to my crown in its land that they have within a league around the church of St Benedict and all other pleas pertaining to my crown."⁷⁸⁶ This grant entailed a substantial curtailment of royal rights, albeit quite limited geographically. But the power given to Ramsey was not novel; Henry II's charter mentions the earlier grant of it by Henry I, but it was older than that.⁷⁸⁷ The extensive rights represented by this liberty have been discussed by others at length, but it is noteworthy that

⁷⁸² *HC*, ed. Mellows, 122.

⁷⁸³ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2046.

⁷⁸⁴ E.g. Abingdon, Athelney, and Aunay. *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, nos. 4, 71, and 85.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 2125.

⁷⁸⁶ "Omnes alias libertates corone mee pertinentes in terra sua quam habent infra unam leugatam circa ecclesiam sancti Benedicti et omnia alia placita corone mee pertinentia. *Ibid.*, no. 2125.

⁷⁸⁷ *RRAN* ii, no. 999; *CAR*, 214.

Henry II was determined to follow his grandfather's precedent, even if this meant that the crown did not reclaim power.⁷⁸⁸

Henry II reinforced his royal position with jurisdiction over all hunting when he allowed houses to share that royal right, at least in the case of small game such as hares. In two different cases Henry II confirmed grants of free warren. Early in his reign he confirmed that Ramsey held the right of warren in Hurstingstone Hundred, Huntingdonshire, and "in his other land."⁷⁸⁹ Hunting without the abbot's license would result in a fine of £10. Although this writ might seem to complement the abbey's farm of Hurstingstone Hundred, the two rights were not connected.⁷⁹⁰ The warren writ follows the wording of one of Henry I's, likely from the second half of his reign.⁷⁹¹ In so doing it remains broader than another of Henry I's writs that granted the abbot warren but only explicitly forbade the hunting of hares on pain of a fine of £10.⁷⁹² This difference may simply reflect the role of hares as the most common animal hunted under warren.⁷⁹³ However, Ramsey was not the only house graced with rights of warren. Thorney was also granted warren from Castor ford to Normancross.⁷⁹⁴ The geographical descriptors of this right are somewhat unclear, as Castor is a village to the west of Peterborough and Normancross a cross on Ermine Street perhaps six miles south-east. Unlike Ramsey's warren the grant is not directly tied to a hundred although Thorney had the farm of Normancross Hundred.⁷⁹⁵ In both instances of warren rights Henry II seems principally concerned with confirming rights that his grandfather had given.

Henry II also confirmed the fairs and markets that benefitted the Fenland houses. Early in his reign he confirmed to Ramsey and its priory of St Ives the annual fair of St Ives in Slepe, Huntingdonshire.⁷⁹⁶ Henry's actions were once more merely a continuation of his grandfather Henry I's policies as evidenced both by the language he repeatedly uses in his charters and writs, "sicut carta regis Henrici avi mei testatur" and by the testimony of Henry

⁷⁸⁸ M. D. Lobel, "The Ecclesiastical Banleuca in England" in *Oxford Essays in Medieval History Presented to Herbert Edward Salter* (Oxford, 1934), 122-140; W. O. Ault, *Private Jurisdiction in England* (Newhaven, 1923); Naomi Hurnard, "The Anglo-Norman Franchises," *The English Historical Review* Vol. LXIV. No. CCLII (July, 1949), 289-327, 316-317.

⁷⁸⁹ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2128.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 2121.

⁷⁹¹ *RRAN* ii, no. 1788; *CAR*, 229. Henry I's charter is witnessed by Richard Basset whose career's beginning is associated with the aftermath of the sinking of the *White Ship* in which Geoffrey Ridel, father of Basset's wife Matilda died.

⁷⁹² *RRAN* ii, no. 1860d; *CAR*, 279.

⁷⁹³ John Hudson, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England Volume II, 871-1216* (Oxford, 2012), 464-465.

⁷⁹⁴ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2620.

⁷⁹⁵ *RRAN* ii, no 1028.

⁷⁹⁶ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2127.

I's charters.⁷⁹⁷ While Henry II's charters mainly suggest that his interest was in continuing his grandfather's legacy, such action helped the monastic houses a great deal. All jurisdictional rights regarding the St Ives' Fair were assigned to Ramsey and these rights no doubt raised the house's revenue. Thorney also benefitted from sales with the presence of the market at Yaxley, Huntingdonshire. This was one of the house's chief manors and a vital interface with the world since the abbey itself was difficult to reach.⁷⁹⁸ Henry II twice confirmed the market early in his reign.⁷⁹⁹ It seems that Henry II granted one of the writs at King's Cliffe, Northamptonshire. R. W. Eyton suggests this visit was made in January 1155 before Henry II travelled through Lincoln.⁸⁰⁰ At Lincoln, Henry issued the second writ that included other matters such as the king's quitclaim of their tolls. The writs themselves reference charters of both Henry I and William I in support of Thorney's weekly Thursday market at Yaxley. Both Ramsey and Thorney benefitted from the additional revenue raised by these mercantile opportunities. Henry II's confirmation of the markets not only shows him fulfilling his royal duties, but also underlines the returning peace and stability in the Fens in which merchants and locals could freely travel to market.

In a final confirmation of a specific right to be considered here, Henry II confirmed the removal of Thorney's manor of Whittlesey St Mary's from Ely's jurisdiction in the Witchford Hundreds.⁸⁰¹ This reaffirmation was included in another clause of his multi-issue Thorney writ. The issue of Whittlesey St Mary's jurisdiction seems to be concerned with a potential conflict rather than an existing complaint. As Nicholas Karn has discussed, this case references a rather problematic situation for both houses.⁸⁰² However, the writ does not seem to be addressing a particular problem in the mid-1150s as Henry neither names the current bishop or prior of Ely nor does he order anyone to do anything. Were the king dealing with a complaint brought to him by the abbot or monks of Thorney, it seems likely that this would be a writ commanding that the recipient permit the monks of Thorney to enjoy their lawful right. Instead it seems that Thorney wished to have up-to-date royal backing for their rights against a powerful neighbor.

⁷⁹⁷ *RRAN* ii, no. 953, *CAR*, 221-222 and 265-266.

⁷⁹⁸ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 42-43.

⁷⁹⁹ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, nos. 2610 and 2614.

⁸⁰⁰ R. W. Eyton, *Court, Household, and Itinerary of King Henry II. Instancing also the chief agents and adversaries of the king in his government, diplomacy, and strategy*. (London, 1878, reprint Hidesheim, 1974), 4.

⁸⁰¹ Henry II's writ confirmed his grandfather's confirmation of Bishop Hervey of Ely's original grant. *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2610; *RRAN* ii, no. 1798; *EEA* 31, no. 11.

⁸⁰² *EEA* 31, no. 11, pp. 26-28.

In all these cases Henry II granted Fenland houses support for rights that should have been well established. By supplying documents to the houses, Henry was able to reinforce his position as heir to his grandfather and as the source of authority that defended monastic holdings. The houses' viewpoint is less certain. On the surface the houses were simply reassured that their historic rights would be safeguarded. However, they may have been looking for more, a firm defense of their legal rights. This case is supported by the narrative histories of both Ely and Ramsey which associate the coming of Henry II with peace and prosperity.⁸⁰³ Henry II's documents suggest that the monks were hoping that the new king would do a better job of protecting them, and the narratives suggest that they were pleased with his ability to create an environment in which they prospered. The evidence implies that Stephen was not as well regarded in this matter.

Problems Predating Stephen's Reign

Although Henry issued a large number of charters that dealt with problems that the houses were encountering, the genesis of these complaints must not be presumed to be in the reign of Stephen. This section will consider problems apparently or certainly antedating the death of Henry I, how Stephen's reign affected them, and what actions Henry II took.

One charter of Henry II's looked back at an action of his grandfather's and thus problems certainly predating Stephen's reign. The question at hand concerned the land in Twywell, Northamptonshire, which had been held in farm by Aubrey de Vere from Thorney during the abbacy of Gunter.⁸⁰⁴ Possibly in 1109, Henry I had informed the important men of Northamptonshire that the land at Twywell held by Aubrey the Chamberlain was only a life grant and should return to the abbey upon his death.⁸⁰⁵ This Aubrey was most likely Aubrey II de Vere who died in 1141, but the point cannot be definitely proven.⁸⁰⁶ In any case, at some point during the brief abbacy of Walter I, 1154-1158, Robert fitz Aubrey quitclaimed the manor to the abbey.⁸⁰⁷ Steps were taken to ensure that this quitclaim would last. Not only did Robert fitz Aubrey associate his son Henry with the quitclaim, but Abbot Walter wisely gave a countergift of twenty silver marks and ensured that a number of witnesses took part in the ceremony.

⁸⁰³ LE, bk. III, ch. 122, pp. 371-372; CAR, 336.

⁸⁰⁴ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2611.

⁸⁰⁵ *RB Thorney* i, 19v

⁸⁰⁶ The argument is supported by the fact that during the reign of Abbot Robert, 1113-1151, Aubrey's son, Robert retained possession of the land and gave an annual gift. The dating would plausibly suggest that Robert fitz Aubrey was the son of Aubrey the Chamberlain, not his son Aubrey, Earl of Oxford. *RB Thorney* ii, 416r-v.

⁸⁰⁷ *RB Thorney* ii, 420v.

At around the same time, Henry II issued a writ supporting Thorney's right to its land at Twywell.⁸⁰⁸ He commanded "all his justices, servants, and men of all England ... that the land of Twywell that Aubrey the chamberlain used to hold" belonged in the demesne of the abbey.⁸⁰⁹ There is some uncertainty of the timeline of these documents. Neither the account of Robert's quitclaim nor Henry's writ defending the abbey's right to Twywell refer to the other action. Although either charter may have come first, it seems plausible that Robert's quitclaim predated the royal charter or else Thorney's record would likely have listed Henry II as support for their case against Robert. Once the abbey had received Robert's quitclaim they likely obtained the royal writ to ensure they had protection of their land. This argument is scarcely water tight, but it seems reasonable. Regardless of which event took first, the charters show Thorney taking action to bring land back into their immediate control and demonstrates that the king's support for monastic houses was available under Henry II.

Ramsey also gained Henry II's support when he issued a writ addressed to the sheriff of Huntingdonshire in which he ordered "that the abbot and monks of Ramsey possess ... their fisheries and marshes ... as in the days of my grandfather King Henry."⁸¹⁰ This writ adds that the sheriff is to ensure that no one fishes in the abbey's fisheries without license at the risk of the substantial fine of £10. Henry II's command here seems to be concerned with a specific wrong and he bases his judgment on the status quo of Henry I. The issue of fisheries in the Fens was a long-term point of contention between the monasteries, and although some specifics of the dispute may have occurred during Stephen's reign, it seems likely that the key issue was one predating his reign. Henry II simply provided support for problems that antedated his reign demonstrating his commitment to establishing stability.

Although not all the problems that Henry addressed originated during Stephen's reign, some certainly became worse during that time. For example, Henry II weighed in on the long-term question of the status of Ramsey Abbey's land at Crawley.⁸¹¹ As mentioned above, the exact location of Crawley is hard to specify, but the land in question is almost certainly in Bedfordshire because it was to the barons and faithful men of that county to whom Henry II directed his notification of confirmation. Ramsey's lands in Crawley and its neighboring Cranfield had been involved in disputes during the reign of Henry I.⁸¹² In 1126

⁸⁰⁸ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent no. 2611.

⁸⁰⁹ "Omnibus iustic(iis) et ministris et hominibus suis totius Angl(ie) ... quod terra de Twywell' quam Albericus camerarius tenebat ..." Ibid., no. 2611.

⁸¹⁰ "Precipio quod abbas et monachi de Ramesia teneant ... piscaturas suas et maras sicut ... tempore H(enrici) regis aui mei." *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2135.

⁸¹¹ Ibid., no. 2132.

⁸¹² Crawley's location is discussed above page 106.

or 1130 Henry I judged the abbey to have a better claim to Crawley wood and its land than Simon de Beauchamp.⁸¹³ Yet in order to strengthen Beauchamp's quitclaim the abbey granted him 20 silver marks and a palfrey. It was to this judgment that Henry I referred in his charter of 1123 x 1130 confirming the lands that Abbot Reginald had gained during his abbacy.⁸¹⁴ About the same time, between 1124 and 1131, Henry I was the key authority behind an inquiry into the borders of Crawley and Cranfield: that judgment was in favor of the abbey's position against Robert Foliot and his brothers.⁸¹⁵ Although neither Stephen nor Matilda mentioned Crawley in any of their extant charters, the land there must have been a problem for Ramsey. On his deathbed, most likely c. 1150 x 1160, Robert de Broi sent his son Walter to return Crawley, which he had violently invaded and held against the right of the church.⁸¹⁶ While it is possible that this wrong postdated Stephen's reign, placing it in the midst of that period seems far more plausible since that reign was known for its violence and Robert de Broi most likely died whilst Stephen was still king.

Crawley was a troubled piece of land for Ramsey over at least two reigns. Very soon into his reign, Henry II issued the notification that he was confirming the judgment of his grandfather when the abbey's claim was upheld against Simon de Beauchamp.⁸¹⁷ Once again, Henry II's writs seem designed to support an abbey against an unjust claim on its land no matter how longstanding. Since the writ does not specify any particular wrongdoer, it offers to the house a protection that extends into the indefinite future. Perhaps Ramsey was simply ensuring support for an often-troubled piece of land. Although Henry II's writ considers the wrong from his grandfather's reign, the protection listed would cover wrongs from Stephen's time as well.

The case of Pytchley shows not only how land could be disputed before Stephen's reign, but also how the nineteen years during Stephen's reign may have added complications. Between 1154 and 1158 Henry II informed the justices, sheriff, barons, and other faithful men of Northamptonshire that he had granted to the church and abbot of Peterborough their manor of Pytchley, "which Geoffrey Ridel held from him just as the charter of our grandfather King Henry attests."⁸¹⁸ The history of this manor and its relationship to the abbey

⁸¹³ *CMR* i, 244-245; *CAR*, 225-226, and *English Lawsuits from William I to Richard I*, 2 vols., ed. R. C. Van Caenegem (London, 1990-1991), vol. i, no. 268.

⁸¹⁴ *RRAN* ii, no. 1686; *CMR*, i, 243-244; ii, 294; *CAR*, 225.

⁸¹⁵ *CMR* i, 143 and Van Caenegem, *Lawsuits*, i, no. 271.

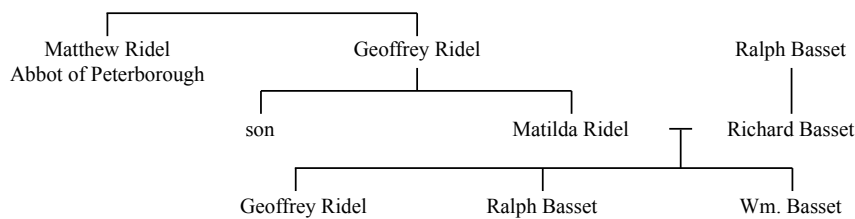
⁸¹⁶ *CMR* i, 257-258. Dating by *Thorney LV*, 230-231.

⁸¹⁷ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2132.

⁸¹⁸ "Concessisse ... quod Gaufrid(us) Ridellus de eo tenuit sicut carta Henr(ici) regis aui nostril testatur." *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2034.

was fraught since the beginning of Henry I's reign. During his one year abbacy of 1102-1103, Abbot Matthew Ridel granted the manor to his brother who served Henry I as a justice.⁸¹⁹ Although the land was, according to Hugh Candidus, supposed to return to the abbey after only one year, Geoffrey Ridel converted the tenancy into a life-holding for four pounds of silver under both Abbots Ernulph and John.⁸²⁰ Soon after, Ridel drowned in the *White Ship* and Abbot John reclaimed the manor, paying Henry I sixty silver marks to guarantee the abbey's possession.⁸²¹ Hugh Candidus's telling of this is confirmed by Henry's charter from 1121 in which the king announced his grant of Pytchley manor to the Abbot and monks of Peterborough.⁸²² Yet that did not settle the matter.

Ridel-Basset Family



823

The problem of Pytchley lingered on through Stephen's reign, perhaps due to the grant by Henry I in 1123 in which he gave to Richard Basset, son of Ralph Basset, Geoffrey Ridel's daughter in marriage and her brother Robert as ward.⁸²⁴ Included with the wardship was control of Geoffrey Ridel's land, which would become permanent should Robert die without a legitimate heir. This is perhaps what happened as the Empress, likely in late 1144, granted to Geoffrey Ridel, son of Richard Basset, all the land of his father Richard and his maternal grandfather.⁸²⁵ This grant suggests that the younger Geoffrey's maternal uncle Robert Ridel was in no position to claim the land of his father. Matilda's grant does not specify any lands by name, leaving unclear the question of whether Geoffrey Ridel had a

⁸¹⁹ Green, Judith, "Ridel, Geoffrey (d. 1120)," *ODNB* (2008) [https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/23617, accessed 20 November 2018], 1. Hugh Candidus refers to Geoffrey as the king's justiciar.

⁸²⁰ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 88-89.

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸²² *RRAN* ii, no. 1244.

⁸²³ Family tree drawn by Nathan Edwards.

⁸²⁴ *RRAN* ii, no. 1389. *RRAN* ii, no. 1390 names Geoffrey's daughter, Richard's wife, as Matilda Ridel. Although this charter is judged to be confected, the name is correct.

⁸²⁵ *RRAN* iii, no. 43. Geoffrey, Earl of Essex confirms the charter; unless his title was recognized before his father's death, the charter cannot date before late September 1144.

claim to Pytchley. On the other hand Matilda's cousin and rival left no doubts about the right of possession. Sometime between 1140 and 1154 Stephen ordered his justices, sheriff, and other faithful men of Northamptonshire that the church and monks of Peterborough were to be in possession of the manor according to the charter of Henry I which Stephen saw with his own eyes.⁸²⁶ The abbey received further support from the bull that Pope Eugenius III granted to Abbot Martin in 1146 which included "Pytchley with its church, mill, and appurtenances."⁸²⁷ It might seem that Abbot Martin deserved Hugh's eulogy in which the abbot was praised because he "took Pytchley from Geoffrey Ridel."⁸²⁸ The king's motivation in supporting Peterborough may show political considerations. Matilda's charter potentially supported Geoffrey Ridel's claim to the manor. It seems possible then that either Stephen sided with the abbey against a supporter of his cousin or that Ridel, unable to gain the land through Stephen, thought he might have better luck by supporting the Empress. By the end of Stephen's reign the question of whether a Ridel-Basset heir had any right to tenancy of Pytchley was unsettled. Stephen and the pope guaranteed full rights to the abbey, but Matilda had given a broad charter that might undermine the abbey's rights.

Henry II's place in the history of the manor is a bit confusing. He is a co-issuer of his mother's charter supporting Geoffrey Ridel's claims to his father's and maternal grandfather's lands.⁸²⁹ About a decade later he supported the abbey's claim whilst noting that Geoffrey Ridel the elder had held it from Peterborough.⁸³⁰ Somewhat later in his reign, Henry issued another writ once again supporting the abbey's right to Pytchley based upon charters of his grandfather and himself.⁸³¹ In it he commanded the sheriff of Northamptonshire to see to it that Abbot William of Peterborough hold his land of Pytchley. Apparently the house's tenure continued to be troubled. Unfortunately for the historian, Henry's writ does not name a wrongdoer. After this, there is no record of Pytchley in Henry II's charters. Perhaps the abbey was untroubled by claimants for the rest of his reign.

In the long term Peterborough was not able to escape having the Ridel-Basset family as tenants. By the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Ridel-Bassetts had resumed possession of the land, and they remained tenants of Peterborough on the manor of Pytchley

⁸²⁶ *RRAN* iii, no. 660.

⁸²⁷ "Phitesle cum ecclesia, molendino, et pertinenciis suis." *HC*, ed. Mellows, 111.

⁸²⁸ "Geffrido quoque Ridel Phitesleiam abstulit." *Ibid.*, 123.

⁸²⁹ *RRAN* iii, no. 43.

⁸³⁰ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2034.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*, no. 2043. While 2034 is dated 1154 x 1158, 2043 is dated 1156 x 1173. Based on the possible dates of issue and the fact that 2043 refers to another charter of his own, I would follow the edition's suggestion that 2043 is issued after 2034.

for much of the rest of the mediaeval period.⁸³² There is no record of how Peterborough was forced to accept them as tenants. Of course, it is possible that Henry II's antipathy towards Abbot William de Waterville caused him to accept an unrecorded plea from Geoffrey Ridel, a not insubstantial tenant-in-chief, and return the manor to Ridel's tenancy.⁸³³ In any case, the records of Henry II show him assisting Peterborough by defending its rights to its manor of Pytchley. Whilst the manor had been a troubled possession since the start of the reign of Henry II, the confusion over rights that occurred during Stephen's reign must have complicated matters immensely. Although the actions of Henry II did not ultimately settle the matter, they must have offered some temporary peace in the situation.

Land held by Thorney also become more troubled under Stephen resulting in Henry II's writ regarding its land in Charwelton, Northamptonshire. Early in his reign, Henry I issued a charter concerning the land and one Simon Chenduit.⁸³⁴ Then, during Abbot Robert's abbacy, the Red Book of Thorney includes two charters about Charwelton. In the first, following a successful suit by the preceding abbot, Gunter, Robert of Staverton of Yaxley quitclaimed the vill.⁸³⁵ In the second Ralph of Normanville, who had "unjustly claimed" the land from the abbey, quitclaimed it.⁸³⁶ This muddle of claimants and charters perhaps explains the broad terms of Henry II's writ in which he ordered the sheriff of Northamptonshire to see to it that the abbot and monks hold their land of Charwelton as they should and without unjust pleas.⁸³⁷ The abbey clearly needed royal support against any and all comers.

Henry II also tried to help Ramsey with questions of tenure that seem to have grown worse during Stephen's reign. Early in his reign Henry II issued another writ benefitting Ramsey and recalling his grandfather's reign.⁸³⁸ The problem in this case was tenure of mills in Ickleford, Hertfordshire. Very early in his reign, Henry I had approved the life-tenure of Reinald of Argentein that had been arranged with Abbot Aldwin.⁸³⁹ The abbey's "acquisition" of this possession is mentioned in Henry I's later charter to Abbot Reginald in

⁸³² VCH *Northamptonshire*, iv, 208-209.

⁸³³ "Cartae Baronum" in the *RB Exchequer* i, 329-331.

⁸³⁴ *RRAN* ii, no. 755.

⁸³⁵ Red Book, 415r-v and , 419v-420r. The case between Robert of Staverton and Thorney is discussed by Frank Stenton in *Facsimiles of Early Charters*, 12-15. Doris Stenton includes a transcription and translation of the case during the time of Abbot Gunter as "an early reference to the Process of Tort" in *English Justice*, 138-139.

⁸³⁶ *RB Thorney* ii, 420r.

⁸³⁷ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2626.

⁸³⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 2134.

⁸³⁹ *RRAN* ii, no. 580.

1123-1130.⁸⁴⁰ Although neither Stephen nor Matilda addressed Ramsey's possession of the mills in any extant charters, Stephen did grant John of Argentein all lands and the office of his father Reginald.⁸⁴¹ This grant might have allowed John a claim to the mills in continuation of his deceased father's tenancy. On the other hand he might have taken them by force confident that the king favored him. In any case, Henry II did not permit the occupancy to continue, but directed the justices and sheriffs in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire "that the abbot and convent of Ramsey should have ... their mill in Ickleford ... just as they had it in the time of King Henry my grandfather and just as his charter which they have testified."⁸⁴² Although this history is a standard mediaeval case of an heir reclaiming a gift made by his ancestors, it is also an example of a wrong relating to Stephen's reign. His charter on behalf of John amplified the problem of inheritance by allowing John to claim the mill with royal support. So Stephen's reign had in this instance, as in others, proved disadvantageous to Ramsey.

Time of War

Of the many charters and writs to assist religious houses which Henry II granted before 1166, a substantial number refer back to the time of war that had so recently ended. Royal charters were shaped by an idea behind the phrase *tempus guerrae*. Decisions made and lands gained during the time of war were illegitimate not merely because they did not align to the time of his grandfather, but also because transactions made under duress or the implicit threat thereof do not withstand legal scrutiny. The charters of Henry II which correct the wrongs of the previous reign grant the interloping King Stephen no mention by name. Instead they show the king referring to the recently past period as a time of war or looking further back to the reign of Henry I. They also, in the name of the new king, set out what is right.

The question of the time of war arose in a writ Henry II issued concerning Ramsey Abbey's manor of Brandish. In the writ, dated 1155 x August 1158, Henry ordered his justices, sheriff, and servants of Hertfordshire not only that the abbot and monks of Ramsey should hold their land at Brandish as it was granted them during the reign of Henry I, but also that there should be no attention granted to Robert Grimbold's claims based upon an

⁸⁴⁰ *RRAN* ii, no. 1686.

⁸⁴¹ *RRAN* iii, no. 23.

⁸⁴² "Quod abbas et conuentus de Rameseia teneant ... molendina sua de Icleford ... sicut illa tenuerunt tempore regis H(enrici) aui mei et sicut carta ipsius quam habent testatur." *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2134.

agreement at the time of war.⁸⁴³ Taken together, it seems that Henry was both reestablishing a general truth, Ramsey holds Brandish, and denying a specific claim, Grimbald's, that was based upon an agreement made during Stephen's reign. In so doing Henry II also makes the implicit statement that changes in land tenure dating from the time of war were not to be granted even slight validity.

Some of Henry II's charters addressing problems from Stephen's reign do not directly say so: instead, external evidence is needed to show the connection. For example, when Henry II acted to ensure that Ramsey be in possession of the manor of Woodwalton, he merely mentions the grants of the manor by Albreda de Scellea and Walter de Bolbec; there is no mention made of the various attempts on the manor discussed above in Chapter two which persistently prevented the abbey from enjoying tenure during Stephen's reign.⁸⁴⁴ Other accounts must fulfill this deficiency and show that Henry II's actions were rectifying wrongs of the time of war. Although Henry II does not explicitly mention the wrongs that occurred during Stephen's reign, by focusing on his grandfather's reign as the time of just tenure he implicitly condemns his cousin and his rule. It is likely that Henry II's charter was attempting to criticize Stephen while restoring a clear sense of right and wrong after a tumultuous period that threatened Ramsey's right to Woodwalton.

Henry also counteracted the time of war as it had affected the life of the Peterborough monks. Although their house historian wrote that Abbot Martin did a good job of keeping affairs in order during Stephen's reign, he acknowledged that troubles abounded even to the point that the abbot took a sabbatical to the Continent to seek spiritual solace from hermits.⁸⁴⁵ Sometime before 1166 Henry II issued a broadly addressed writ commanding "the justices and sheriffs and all his servants of all England" that "serfs" who fled after the death of Henry I be returned to the abbey.⁸⁴⁶ While this writ does not use the phrase "time of war" it certainly recognizes the idea that the reign of Stephen saw unlawful activities that needed to be righted. In a much more narrowly dated and addressed writ, Henry informed "his justices, sheriffs, and servants in whose jurisdictions the abbot of Peterborough has lands and fees" that he confirmed the "knights and military fees and other holdings" which Peterborough held on the day of Henry I's death.⁸⁴⁷ And if that was not sufficient to indicate that the abbot of

⁸⁴³ "Non respondeant inde Roberto Grimbald pro aliqua conuentione que inde fact esset tempore guerre."

Charters of Henry II, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2133.

⁸⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 2131. See above pages 62-64.

⁸⁴⁵ *HC*, ed. Mellows, 122.

⁸⁴⁶ "Iustic(iis) et vic(ecomitibus) et omnibus ministris suis totius Anglie ... natiuos et fugitiuos." *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2036.

⁸⁴⁷ "Milites et feoda militum et alias teneuras." *Ibid.*, no. 2038.

Peterborough had rights over these knights, the charter continues by explicitly stating that the knights and men of the honour fulfill their service just as was done to the predecessors of the abbot or else the abbot would, with the king's permission, seize himself of the fees of the non-performing knights and men. In this writ it seems that Henry II was well aware, at least in the case of Peterborough, of how the intervening reign had diminished the seignorial rights of an abbot. This diminution also concerned the king himself since it threatened the knight service that was owed to him. If the abbot of Peterborough were unable to fulfill his heavy service, the king's military strength would be weakened as a result.

Another writ of Henry II's is likely connected to land alienated during the time of war although it is possible that the writ addresses a wrong postdating Stephen's reign.⁸⁴⁸ Henry II's command to the sheriff of Lincolnshire that he re seize the abbot of Ramsey of the land at Threkingham notes that the abbot was "unjustly and without justice dissesied."⁸⁴⁹ Ramsey's records twice refer to land in Threkingham in connection with the abbacy of Walter, which largely corresponded to Stephen's reign. In the first, a listing of properties that Abbot Walter alienated without the assent of the convent includes the land at Threkingham; but this may not be the whole story. A charter, recorded twice in the *Cartularium Monasterii de Rameseia* shows Walter lawfully granting away land in Maring, Threkingham, with an impressive witness list including five abbots and the assent of the convent.⁸⁵⁰ This grant was made late in Stephen's reign, likely when Walter was attempting to restore Ramsey to financial probity. It may represent the abbot trying to salvage property that was stolen by setting up the occupant as a formal tenant of the house, or Walter's grant could represent land that was more problematic to keep in demesne than to grant out for rent. In any case, Henry II permitted the house to reclaim some if not all of its land in Threkingham. It is possible that the land wrongfully disseised was a different piece from that which Abbot Walter granted out for rent. Unfortunately, Henry II's charter is so loosely datable and unclear in referencing malefactors that it is uncertain whether Walter was still the abbot and what was the origin of the claim. Regardless of whether the two Threkingham charters should be considered to refer to the same issue, Henry II's writ seems designed to right a wrong from time of war.

Thorney's cartulary provides two explicit evocations of the troubles during Stephen's reign using the phrase "per guerram." Henry II granted two separate writs, both of which refer to the monks of Thorney as well as the house's abbot. One concerned Abbot Herbert,

⁸⁴⁸ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2136.

⁸⁴⁹ "Iniuste et sine iudicio dissesaiatus est." *Ibid.*, no. 2136.

⁸⁵⁰ *CMR* i, 258-259; ii, 266.

while the other mentioned an Abbot Walter, probably the second by that name. In both writs Henry II granted that the monks and abbot were to hold all that they should hold.⁸⁵¹ The writs assert Henry II's basic test of rightful possession: what did the abbey hold on the day that Henry I, his grandfather, was alive and dead? The writs attribute wrongs that had occurred in the intervening years "after the death of King Henry" to one of three causes. They occurred "through Abbot Gilbert or through Walter [presumably the first] or through the war."⁸⁵² All three circumstances share the common attribute that the church was disseised of its lands "without the consent of the convent." Admittedly, some of these wrongs may have been post-Stephen since Walter I served 1154-1158. Since these charters were issued covering all the abbey's possessions, it was beyond their scope to specify exactly which troubles were caused by whom or what. Henry II simply presented the fact that the house ought to regain its lands that had been unlawfully disposed of. Even taking the lack of precise ties to specific lands and causes, at least some of the abbey's missing lands seemed attributable to the war. And the monks and later abbots needed help restoring lands that were uncanonically and apparently violently, taken from the house during such war. While it would be helpful to know whether the author of these writs viewed *guerra* as "the war" or just "war/warfare," it seems clear that during Stephen's reign either "the war" or some degree of unchecked "war" was sufficient to threaten Thorney, an abbey not particularly associated with the ravages of Stephen's reign.⁸⁵³

As the preceding examples from the Fenland houses show, Henry II's charters use the concept of *tempus guerrae* to delegitimize actions taken during Stephen's reign. Graeme White notes "a *tempus guerrae* [lacks] validity as a basis for obligation."⁸⁵⁴ By referring back to Stephen's reign with such a pejorative phrase, Henry II's writs and charters emphasize the law and order accompanying the new king's rule. Yet while *tempus guerrae* may have had political use, it also had denotative value for the Fenlands when describing parts of Stephen's reign. Furthermore, the term is not ubiquitous in the many writs and charters that Henry II issued. Only a few use the term "time of war." Perhaps the majority of the cases were not clear enough to invoke the term "time of war" or perhaps the term was understood to so generally underwrite the abbeys' problems that it was often unnecessary to state. In either

⁸⁵¹ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, nos. 2621 and 2630.

⁸⁵² "Per abbatem Gilbertum vel per Walterum vel per guerram." *Ibid.*, nos. 2621 and 2630.

⁸⁵³ Callahan, "Impact," 221n.

⁸⁵⁴ White, "Myth of the Anarchy," 323. White comments on the use of "*tempus guerrae*" as a means for Henry II to avoid "obligations which [he] might otherwise have had to honour."

case, Henry's charters use the term occasionally and at those points draw attention to problems of the houses as the result of the lawlessness encountered in Stephen's reign.

Problems Possibly Dating to Stephen's Reign

Although not all cases are clearly datable, these charters show Henry II helping strengthen the houses' rights to the lands that they claimed. Inasmuch as contemporaries considered Stephen's reign to be a troublesome time for monasticism, these charters also show Henry II counteracting the reign of his cousin.⁸⁵⁵

For example, Ramsey received a writ that addressed issues perhaps, but not certainly, from Stephen's reign. Most likely between 1155 and 1166, Henry II issued a writ to all sheriffs in whose lands Ramsey held possessions.⁸⁵⁶ These men were to ensure that the unnamed abbot of Ramsey hold his lands and men in peace and furthermore that he not be troubled by unjust pleas. This writ could potentially have been issued as late as 1172. However, between 1163 and 1172 Henry issued another writ along the same lines that seems to refer back to this one.⁸⁵⁷ Since it almost certainly preceded the second, the first writ likely dates before 1166, and the issues it raises are consistent with those in other writs certainly dated before 1166.

Turning then to the content of the first writ itself, Henry's writ benefitting Ramsey shows that the abbey was not only threatened by the loss of men and lands, but also by lawsuits. Such lawsuits had the potential to prevent the abbey from regaining seisin of lands whilst the court heard ongoing suits. Since Ramsey had suffered more dramatically during Stephen's reign than any of the other Fenland houses, it is possible that Henry would be particularly interested in erasing any invalid claims. That being said, the wording of the writ is so vague there is no way to be certain that it was drafted in response to grievances specifically related to the problems of Stephen's reign.

Ramsey also had another problem at an estate in Huntingdonshire that most likely dated to Stephen's reign. Many of the details are somewhat vague. To begin with, the name Stukeley is used by Domesday to refer to different manors.⁸⁵⁸ Some of the land held under this name was held by the Honour of Huntingdon in Great Stukeley, whilst Little Stukeley

⁸⁵⁵ Callahan, "Impact" and "Ecclesiastical Reparations."

⁸⁵⁶ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2138.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 2139.

⁸⁵⁸ Huntingdonshire, 204 r., Phillimore, 6.1; Huntingdonshire, 206r., Phillimore, 19.10; Huntingdonshire, 206v., Phillimore, 20.3.

was completely in Ramsey Abbey's demesne.⁸⁵⁹ In addition to the question of what Stukeley refers to, Henry II's writ concerning Ramsey and Stukeley can only be loosely dated. It most likely was issued 1154 to 1158, but can only certainly be dated to sometime before 1172.⁸⁶⁰ These questions aside, some details of the case are more sure.

Around 1110 Henry I arranged that the abbey's lands be held by his chaplain, William of Lincoln, for life.⁸⁶¹ It was perhaps after William's death that Abbot Reginald (1114-1133) reclaimed Stukeley and gained Henry's recognition of it amongst "lands acquired."⁸⁶² These mentions aside, it seems that Ramsey's lands in Stukeley were largely not a point of contention during Henry I's reign. However, when Henry II issued a concerning writ Stukeley he ordered the sheriff of Huntingdonshire, "that you have the men of the county make known the boundaries between Stukeley of the earl and that of the abbot of Ramsey,"⁸⁶³ Although Simon de Senlis II, sometime earl of Huntingdon and Northampton, had died before Henry's accession, it is plausible that his acquisitive bent left the honour's borders uncertain for the next earl. The writ's references to "the earl" suggest a specific man, not just the office. The use of this term perhaps narrows the dating to July 1157 x 1158 since Malcolm IV of Scotland was not granted the honour of Huntingdon until then.⁸⁶⁴ Regardless of the dating, the king's command seemingly solved the problem as no further records of dispute remain. The writ takes the part of the abbey suggesting that the dispute was raised by Ramsey rather than the earl. While there is no way to prove what prompted the dispute over comital and abbatial boundaries to arise, it may well have been the uncertainty during the Stephen's reign when the abbey was unable to oversee its lands. Once again, Henry II, at an abbey's instigation, tried to resolve issues of land possession.

Peterborough Abbey also had a problematic tenancy that may have originated during Stephen's reign. Early in his reign Henry II ordered his "justices, sheriff, and servants" in Lincolnshire to see to it that the abbot of Peterborough have his land at "Thorp" for eight shillings.⁸⁶⁵ Further details are unclear as this writ fails to state who was wronging the abbey or when the problem arose. However, some years later, between 1156 and 1173, Henry issued another writ to the sheriff and servants of Lincolnshire – but this time not to the

⁸⁵⁹ VCH *Huntingdonshire*, ii, 230-231, 234-235.

⁸⁶⁰ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2119.

⁸⁶¹ *RRAN* ii, no. 966.

⁸⁶² *Ibid.*, no. 1686.

⁸⁶³ "Quod facias recognosci per homines de comitatu diuisas inter Stiuecleiam com(itis) et Stiuecleiam abbatis Ramesie." *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2119.

⁸⁶⁴ W. W. Scott, "Malcolm IV (1141-1165)," *ODNB* (2008) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17860>, accessed 20 November 2018], 1.

⁸⁶⁵ "Iustic(iis) et vic(ecomiti) et ministris." *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2033.

justices – once again commanding that the abbot of Peterborough, and this time the monks too, have their land of “Thorp,” “as the charters of King Henry my grandfather and mine testify.”⁸⁶⁶ The simplest reading of these writs is that Henry II granted the first regarding this land called “Thorp” with minimal explanation, and when the problems continued, he issued another on the same matter and in so doing made it clear that the land in question was also a problem before Stephen’s reign.

However, the name “Thorp” does not unreservedly support that argument. “Thorp” might refer to a number of settlements in Lincolnshire or Northamptonshire. Vincent assumes that it refers to Longthorpe, a settlement in Peterborough’s close neighborhood. If that were the case it seems surprising that Henry II addressed his writs to officials from Lincolnshire and not Northamptonshire. Van Caenegem places “Thorp” as Northorpe, Lincolnshire.⁸⁶⁷ This solution is plausible and explains the recipients. The charters of Henry I also seem to support placing “Thorp” in Lincolnshire as in 1114 Henry issued a charter in favor of Peterborough regarding lands with the “Thorp” suffix in Lincolnshire.⁸⁶⁸ This charter could be that referred to by Henry II. In addition, Henry I also issued a writ to William d’Aubigny Brito between 1100-1133 that defended Peterborough’s land in Thorp.⁸⁶⁹ This second Henry I charter refers to a rent of 8 shillings, as did the first of Henry II. Considering that d’Aubigny Brito served as a justice in Lincolnshire, it seems likely that at least Henry II’s first writ refers to this same case.⁸⁷⁰ A charter of Stephen’s might also support the case for Northorpe. Likely before the Battle of Lincoln, Stephen issued a writ defending Peterborough’s right to Northorpe, Lincolnshire, against the canons of Lincoln.⁸⁷¹ This charter shows clearly that Peterborough had trouble with their holding of a “Thorp” in Lincolnshire. Taken together, the charters of the three kings make a case that Peterborough’s difficulties in “Thorp” related to their land at Northorpe, Lincolnshire, and that these problems persisted throughout the first half of the twelfth century. When Henry II’s charters refer to “Thorpe” rather than “Nortorp” it may be that they are reflecting those of his grandfather in their unclear language because Henry I’s charters, even if deficient in clarity, would be deemed better than those of Stephen, even if more precise. While questions still remain, this uncertainty does not make the charters unprofitable for this study. It is still clear that Henry II worked with Peterborough Abbey to

⁸⁶⁶ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2042.

⁸⁶⁷ *English Lawsuits*, ed. Van Caenegem (London, 1990-1991), ii, no. 398.

⁸⁶⁸ *RRAN* ii, no. 1038.

⁸⁶⁹ *RRAN* ii, no. 1858.

⁸⁷⁰ K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, “Aubigné, William d’ [William de Albin; *known as* William d’Aubigné Brito] (*d.* in or after 1148),” *ODNB* (2004) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/281>, accessed 20 November 2018], 1.

⁸⁷¹ *RRAN* iii, no. 656.

restore its rightful possession of one or more lands called Thorp. In at least one case Henry II was dealing with a question of possession dating back at least to the reign of his grandfather. It is also clear that Stephen's actions were insufficient to settle the matter and that Henry II supported the monks of Peterborough. The lesson from the charters must focus on Henry II's helpful attitude to Peterborough and his evocation, once again, of his grandfather's reign.

In another writ benefitting Peterborough, probably dating 1155 x August 1158, Henry II ordered the Northamptonshire forester, Fulk of Lisors, to ensure the abbot of Peterborough the liberty and customs which his antecessors had in the thickets of Peterborough.⁸⁷² While it seems possible that the house was suffering from an overbearing forester, it is also possible that during Stephen's reign one of the local knights had taken advantage of the relative weakness of the abbot to hunt in contravention of the abbey's rights. Although the inclusion of a *nisi feceris* clause may suggest that the forester was causing the wrong or more likely neglecting his duty to right it, it may simply reflect changes in the standard language of writs.⁸⁷³ This writ could either be showing how problems arose even under the stronger government of Henry II or else how the new king was still busy fixing wrongs from the previous reign. In either case, it certainly shows Henry trying to meet the abbey's demands for justice.

Thorney also had cases of questionable dating such as one from Bolnhurst, Bedfordshire. Most likely before August 1158 Henry II commanded his officers in Bedfordshire that Thorney Abbey should hold its land in Bolnhurst justly, as in the time of Henry I.⁸⁷⁴ After this general defense of the abbey's land, the writ specifies that it is concerned "expressly [with] two virgates of land which Simon fitz Godwin Dedi claims, lest anyone trouble or disturb or unjustly impleads them concerning that [land]."⁸⁷⁵ This problem cannot be certainly linked back to Stephen's reign, and potentially it could have occurred early in that of his successor. Yet given the date of the writ, the case most likely arose during the time of war. Although the background of the case is uncertain, Henry II's charter recalls once again the basic question of tenure: how was the land held in pre-Stephen? As evidenced earlier, Henry II seemed to generally discount anything that happened after his grandfather's death. The writ presumes that the abbey had the rightful claim to the land, and thus, it seems

⁸⁷² *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2040. *Precipio quod abbas ... habeat iuste in buruillis de Burgo...*

⁸⁷³ See, Julia Boorman, "Nisi Feceris," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 24, ed. John Gillingham (Woodbridge, 2002), 84-97.

⁸⁷⁴ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2616.

⁸⁷⁵ "Nominatim duas virgatas terre quas Simon filius Godwini Dedi clamat, ne quis eos inde vexet vel inquietet vel in placitum ponat inuiste." *Ibid.*, no. 2616.

probable that Simon's claim arose during Stephen's reign. Although associating the wrong with Stephen's reign is a logical conclusion, only Henry II's support of justice for the abbey can be certainly shown.

Henry II again acted on Thorney's behalf in a case of a gift to the abbey having been misappropriated by the heir of the donor, quite possibly after Stephen's death. The case seems to begin perhaps as early as 1141 x 1143 when Ranulf of Chester confirmed a donation from William de Aubigny of land in Stoke Albany, Northamptonshire.⁸⁷⁶ Later in 1145 x 1146 Ranulf issued a charter which included both Stoke and Pipewell and added *Brito* to the donor's name.⁸⁷⁷ The gift must have been completed before February 1148 when Alexander of Lincoln died since William I d'Aubigny Brito issued a letter to the bishop informing him of the grant and associating his wife Cecilia and son William with it.⁸⁷⁸ Interestingly, no later than 1151, Bishop Robert de Chesney issued his confirmation of Thorney's properties that included Stoke although not Pipewell.⁸⁷⁹ Therefore it is possible that the problem of withholding donated land from Thorney began during the life of William I de Aubigny Brito. In either case, it clearly was a concern after his death. Sometime before 1166, Henry II issued a writ to William de Aubigny regarding land in Pipewell and Stoke [Albany] which his father had granted to the monks of Thorney and he was currently withholding.⁸⁸⁰ Henry's writ ordered the return of the land, corn, and cattle to the monks. Since William I de Aubigny Brito died no earlier than 1148, it is possible that his son William II de Aubigny Brito was actually continuing an action of his father's.⁸⁸¹ The more likely case is that William I de Aubigny Brito had given land, but his son, either in the last years of Stephen's reign or in the beginning of Henry II's, reclaimed it. Thus in another case it can be seen that Henry II was defending an abbey against a wrong that occurred perhaps during Stephen's reign, but quite possibly afterwards. In any case it was a problem that was not necessarily specific to "the time of war" but might demonstrate that the commonplace wrong of reclaimed inheritance flourished under Stephen.

In addition to granting charters aiding both Ramsey and Peterborough, Henry II commanded Walter Brito to do right to Thorney regarding the virgate of land he had deforced

⁸⁷⁶ *RB Thorney* ii, 205v; *Charters of the Earls of Chester*, ed. Barraclough, no. 57.

⁸⁷⁷ *RB Thorney* ii, 205v; *Charters of the Earls of Chester*, ed. Barraclough, no. 58.

⁸⁷⁸ *RB Thorney* ii, 205r-v.

⁸⁷⁹ *EEA* 1, no. 265; *RB Thorney* i, 170r-v.

⁸⁸⁰ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2629. The edition does not argue for William I or William II, but other evidence makes it clear that William II is the subject of Henry II's command.

⁸⁸¹ *Thorney LV*, 226.

in Wolfhampcote, Warwickshire.⁸⁸² Should Walter not fulfill the royal command, the sheriff of Warwickshire would see to it. Since there is no clear reference to this land in other royal or abbatial charters, it may suggest that this was a new wrong that arose during or after the reign of Stephen. On the other hand, it could also have been an earlier wrong that was not addressed earlier. The land itself lay on the border of Warwickshire and Northamptonshire and was perhaps the same land that had been subject to an earlier royal writ when Henry I commanded Almod the Archdeacon to restore Sawbridge, Warwickshire, a manor constituent of Wolfhampcote.⁸⁸³ Of course in this case Thorney was only missing one virgate. A potential connection back to Stephen's reign shows up with the claims of Earl Ranulf of Chester who had ambitions in the Midlands.⁸⁸⁴ A Walter Brito is found in records in connection with Earl Ranulf.⁸⁸⁵ Of course that name is scarcely unique and might apply to more than one individual in the mid twelfth century. However, if it is the same man, he may have used his ties to Earl Ranulf to help himself to abbatial land during the time of war. Since the links are unstated in the charter, this case must be considered unproven as to whether it occurred during Stephen's reign or that of Henry II. Even if the case originated under Henry II, it shows something of the contrast between his reign and that of his predecessor. Stephen's ability to help religious houses was somewhat geographically constrained whereas Henry II's writ ran throughout the land.⁸⁸⁶ The county of Warwickshire "was devastated by a private war between Earl Ranulf of Chester and Robert Marmion" from 1141-1146.⁸⁸⁷ Under Henry II such a situation would not have been tolerated.

Problems Probably Postdating Stephen's Reign

The question of wrongs arising during the reign of Henry II helps to broaden the understanding of the Fenland houses during Stephen's reign. Noting that new cases occurred after 1154 helps moderate an extreme view that Stephen's reign was anarchy. Of course, religious houses were wronged under every mediaeval king of England, and Stephen should not be considered as the cause of all violence during his reign. However, Henry II's writs and charters dealing with potentially new issues have relevance in showing the king's

⁸⁸² *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent II, no. 2607. The writ was most likely granted by 1166.

⁸⁸³ *RRAN* ii, no. 1033.

⁸⁸⁴ Crouch, *Stephen*, 138-139.

⁸⁸⁵ Peter Coss, *Lordship, knighthood and locality: A study in English society c. 1180 – c. 1280* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 47-48; *The Early Records of Medieval Coventry*, ed. Peter Coss (London, 1986), no. 10.

⁸⁸⁶ "Outside of Essex and the southeast, we cannot be in any way confident that the concept of royal justice survived into the second half of the reign." Crouch, *Stephen*, 339.

⁸⁸⁷ David Crouch, *The Beaumont Twins: the Roots and Branches of Power in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1986), 56.

competence dealing with problems. Part of the contrast between the reigns of Stephen and Henry II is that under the latter houses seemed to have more of these wrongs addressed by royal charter. Although Stephen was able to hold onto the throne for nineteen years, the number of writs and charters that Henry II issued suggests that he was able to exercise royal power more effectively. This can be seen particularly in the case of the Fenland houses as Henry II's seventy-one charters likely dating 1155 x 1166 significantly outnumber the forty-four issued by Stephen over his nineteen years as king. In considering the cases most likely arising during the reign of Henry II, a clearer picture emerges of how Henry II's governance benefitted the Fenland houses, and how the land enjoying greater stability under Henry II's rule.

One example of such governance occurred in a case involving Peterborough. Sometime between 1156 and 1173 Henry II commanded his officers in Northamptonshire to implement the ruling they heard in his court regarding the common pasture between Northborough and Glinton.⁸⁸⁸ Furthermore, Henry II wanted to be sure that the monks of Peterborough were no longer troubled by pleas concerning this issue. Once again, Henry's writ sheds no light on the issue of chronology, but as none of the extant charters of Henry I, Stephen, or Matilda mention the issue of pasturage here, it is possible that the issue may have occurred post-Stephen. Even so, the writ suggests that the problem was of a sufficient duration to be greatly troubling to the monks and that Henry II acted to solve it.

The rest of the examples of problems likely arising during the reign of Henry II come from Thorney. Since there are more charters from Henry II that benefit Thorney than charters that benefit other houses, this discrepancy is not surprising. One example comes in the form of two writs regarding land in Tydd, on the Lincolnshire and Norfolk border. These writs seem quite likely to refer to events from Henry's reign as the land in question was donated to Thorney as late as 1150 and because the second writ was likely issued at least a decade into Henry II's reign.⁸⁸⁹ In the earlier writ Henry commanded Richard of Tydd to do right to the abbot and monks regarding land in Tydd and the four sons of Alnoth. The church claimed the land and men to be theirs as a gift of one William de Ros, and possessed a charter that supported their claim.⁸⁹⁰ However, the combination of charter evidence and royal writ were apparently unable to answer the need, and Henry had to issue a second writ in order to ensure

⁸⁸⁸ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2044.

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 2624 and 2628. The second, no. 2628, is chronologically first. H. E. Hallam, *Settlement and Society: a study of the early argrarian history of South Lincolnshire* (Cambridge, 1965), 181.

⁸⁹⁰ *RB Thorney* ii, 244r.

the abbey's rightful possession of its property.⁸⁹¹ In this writ he addressed Richard fitz Robert of Tydd. The wrongdoer's full name helps expand the history of the land. The rubrication of another charter saved in the *Red Book* identifies Richard fitz Robert's wife as Margaret, daughter of William de Ros.⁸⁹² The problem of land in Tydd was thus not simply someone claiming the abbey's lands, but someone attempting to reclaim a family donation to the house. Although the loose dating of the first charter allows for Richard fitz Robert's claim to Tydd to have begun under Stephen, the second charter clearly places the wrong, at least in its continuation, into the reign of Henry II. The problem itself was scarcely remarkable and could have begun under any king. Donor's actions were regularly challenged by their heirs.⁸⁹³ On the other hand, the solution shows that Henry II was willing and able to support the abbeys of his kingdom when they were wronged.

Donors themselves might fail to uphold a gift as in the case of a writ Henry II issued to Hugh de Wellebeof commanding him to fulfill his donation to Thorney.⁸⁹⁴ Henry included a double *nisi feceris* clause, which called first upon Countess Rohese of Bedford and secondly upon the sheriff of Bedfordshire to ensure that Hugh's donation be fulfilled. The countess was involved because she and her second husband, Payn de Beauchamp, had confirmed the gift as attested in a charter copied in Thorney's *Red Book*.⁸⁹⁵ This connection dates the original grant to no later than Payn's death in 1155.⁸⁹⁶ In their charter Payn and Rohese granted a virgate, twenty-seven acres, and a rod in Colmworth, Bedfordshire, which Hugh fitz Ralph de Wellebeof gave the abbey for his father's soul. It may be that Hugh's concern for his father's soul had diminished over the years after the donation, and that by Henry II's reign he decided to renege on his gift. Fortunately for Thorney, possession of a the Beauchamp charter testifying to the gift helped the house to gain royal backing for its claim. Although this case cannot be dated closer than 1155 x c. 1166 and may well have originated during Stephen's reign chronologically, typologically it aligns with many cases in which donors or their heirs wished to recall their donations.⁸⁹⁷ There is therefore little ground for considering this particular case as uniquely related to Stephen's reign especially since it does

⁸⁹¹ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2624.

⁸⁹² *RB Thorney* ii, 244v. In another charter Margaret self identifies as the daughter of William de Ros and names her then-deceased husband as Richard of Putteale. *RB Thorney* ii, 245r.

⁸⁹³ Hudson, *Land, Law, and Lordship*, 189-191.

⁸⁹⁴ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2615. Hugh's surname possibly Oildebof or Weldebeuf; *Thorney LV*, 267.

⁸⁹⁵ *RB Thorney* ii, 295r.

⁸⁹⁶ Kathryn Faulkner, "Beauchamp, de, family (*per. C. 1080-c. 1265*)," *ODNB* (2004) [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/54497>, accessed 20 November 2018], 1.

⁸⁹⁷ Although the edition says "1155 x April 1172, ?1155 x August 1158" since Rohese died c. 1166 the writ's end date can be limited to c. 1166. Faulkner, "Beauchamp, de, family," *ODNB*, 1.

not include wording referring to “time of war.” Hugh de Wellebeof’s failure to uphold his donation is an example of a wrong that could have stemmed from the turmoil of Stephen’s reign, but plausibly arose from other causes.

In two other writs which may be concerned with issues dating from Stephen’s reign, Henry II addressed sheriffs concerning Thorney. In one he notified the sheriff of Huntingdonshire that Abbot Herbert and his men were under the king’s protection and the sheriff should see to it that the abbot and all his things be preserved lest any of the sheriff’s servants do injury to them.⁸⁹⁸ This rather strongly worded writ suggests that the new abbot and the local sheriff had a poor relationship. In any case, Henry certainly desired the new abbot to enjoy peace rather than be pestered by demands from the sheriff’s servants. The problem here seems to be relevant most particularly to Huntingdonshire post-Stephen, yet the abbey may well have endured such treatment previously and was unable to seek redress any earlier. Whether or not the problem antedated Henry II, this writ makes a clear point that in Henry II’s realm Thorney is not to be bothered.

The abbey gained a second writ addressed to the sheriffs of Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, and Bedfordshire along the same lines.⁸⁹⁹ Although the wording varies slightly, the general message is the same: Thorney’s possessions are under the king’s protection and must not be troubled. In this case the writ cannot be tied to an early date, but the topic suggests that Henry II issued this early in his reign. These show that the abbey was troubled by unjust treatment, or at least claimed that it was. Although it may have been a longstanding problem, there is no internal reason to link this treatment by the sheriffs to Stephen’s reign. Henry II certainly wanted Thorney to be treated justly by his sheriffs and he was able to respond to the abbey’s needs, whereas Stephen might have struggled to do so.

Another problem that Thorney faced was threats to its possession of churches. Henry II dealt with the problem in a general way by ordering Bishop Robert de Chesney that he see to it that the abbey hold its churches and possessions as on the day of his grandfather’s death.⁹⁰⁰ While this command is so vague that it fails to help shed much light on the situation at hand, it seems that the abbey wanted a general command to a local bishop, though not the house’s own diocesan, Nigel of Ely. The desire for a general command could stem from the fact that the problems facing Thorney were numerous and a general command was more efficient than listing them individually. Another explanation could be that they wanted a

⁸⁹⁸ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2619.

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 2625. The charter reads “*Hampt’scir*” but Vincent agrees with Brian Kemp that this must be a scribal error for Northamptonshire.

⁹⁰⁰ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2622.

catch-all writ that could be turned to whatever purpose they needed. In either case the abbey was certainly concerned enough about its churches that it sought royal help. Unfortunately this writ cannot be dated any closer than 1155 x March 1166. While it may well have been written to deal with wrongs associated with the warfare of Stephen's reign, it cannot be shown to do so. Instead it must be treated as another case of Henry II supporting justice for the abbeys of the land.

Longstanding Rights

Henry II also dealt with threats to longstanding rights that the abbeys possessed. This chapter earlier considered some of these rights when they were being confirmed by Henry II. On occasion, the rights were violated and necessitated more than a simple confirmation to ensure a house not be imposed upon. The following two cases concern rights that were being threatened.

Sometime between 1155 and 1158 Henry II commanded "the sheriff and all his servants of Suffolk ... that ... Lawshall vill, pertaining to Ramsey, and all its men be quit of shires, hundreds, and pleas and all other suits except murder and robbery."⁹⁰¹ This grant restates two writs of Henry I who also extended other freedoms to Lawshall.⁹⁰² Whilst the rights raised in the writ could simply have been confirmed by a charter to the abbey, the *praecipio* and recipients of the writ suggest that perhaps the sheriff or other servants were wrongfully forcing Ramsey's vill to respond to suits and that the abbey decided to act upon the problem. Henry II, perhaps at around the same time or perhaps later, also wrote to the Abbot of Bury St Edmunds regarding Ramsey's tenure of Lawshall.⁹⁰³ In this case Bury's officers were apparently wronging Ramsey's vill and Henry II commanded that the "injury" stop or else his sheriff of Suffolk or his justice would deal with the case.⁹⁰⁴ Neither writ suggests that the two issues were connected, but it seems clear that Ramsey's holding of Lawshall caused some problems for the house, perhaps over a long period. There is no certainty that the issues Henry II addressed in these charters antedated his reign, as when appealing back to his grandfather's charters Henry II seems simply to be making an appeal to

⁹⁰¹ "Vic(ecomiti) et omnibus ministris suis de Sudfolc ... quod ... esse quietam Laweshellam villam sancti Benedicti de Ramesia et omnes homines suos de sciris et de hondredis et de placit(is) et omnibus aliis querelis excepto murthero et latrocinio," *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2130.

⁹⁰² *RRAN* ii, nos. 738, 739, and 1067. The first writ is directed to Roger Bigod and all his servants of Suffolk and, the second to Robert, Abbot of St Edmund's and all his servants and men. The final charter informed Albold, Abbot of St Edmund's and William Bigod that Ramsey had been granted warren in Lawshall.

⁹⁰³ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2137. Vincent believes the writ likely dates 1155 x March 1166.

⁹⁰⁴ "Iniuriam vel contumeliam" *Ibid.*, no. 2137

authority and, as always, ignoring his immediate predecessor. However, it seems likely, especially in the writ to the sheriff of Suffolk, that the problem were current during Stephen's reign. A complaint being answered in the years 1155-1158 probably predates the reign of Henry II. The case of Bury St Edmunds is less certain, but it is so loosely dated that it too might stem from the time of war. They might both show when local actors in Suffolk availed themselves of Ramsey's weakness to encroach on the abbey's rights. Yet Ramsey must have suffered problems with its holding in Lawshall predating Stephen's reign as shown by Henry I's two writs that command observance of the abbey's rights. Whether the wrongs addressed by Henry II's writs had persisted since his grandfather's reign or stemmed from the troubles of Stephen, the new king's charters simply defend Ramsey's rights during his reign.

Henry II also defended a right of Thorney's. A writ commanded his sheriff and servants of Huntingdonshire that the abbot of Thorney be quit of working on the royal hedge or enclosure, at Brampton, Huntingdonshire, just as his grandfather Henry I had ordered.⁹⁰⁵ Thorney's *Red Book* actually records four charters of Henry I on this matter, suggesting that the problem was not particularly straightforward.⁹⁰⁶ Stephen had also issued a writ to the sheriff of Huntingdonshire in Thorney's favor, commanding that Henry I's writ be followed.⁹⁰⁷ Thus, although details are vague, it must be understood that the monks of Thorney were regularly being importuned to do work from which they were legally free. It is possible that they merely requested this writ from Henry II as a preventative measure after having dealt with so much bother under Henry I, but the firm *praecipio* suggests a more pressing concern. Abbatial rights just as much as abbatial lands needed diligent safeguarding.

Themes in Henry II's Charters

In addition to surveying the categories of charters, considering themes helps show what the abbeys were experiencing during Henry's reign. First, the Fenland data makes it look as though smaller houses needed more royal help. Yet this conclusion cannot be argued based on the Fens. Although Thorney received disproportionately many charters of support from the king, the high number of charters for Thorney may be connected to issues not connected to Stephen. Compared to the other Fenland houses Thorney had far more abbots during the first decade of Henry's reign. The lack of stability in abbatial governance might well have led

⁹⁰⁵ The word is *haia*. *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 2613. "A favourite residence" of Henry I's was at Brampton. H. M. Colvin, R. Allen Brown, and A. J. Taylor, *The History of the King's Work Volume II The Middle Ages* (London, 1963), 901-902.

⁹⁰⁶ *RB Thorney* i, 24r; *RRAN* ii, nos. 1414, 1452, 1456, and 1462.

⁹⁰⁷ *RRAN* iii, no. 880

it to be weak in pursuing its legal cases or left it potentially open to victimization. This might account for the occasions when the abbey received two charters referring to the same case. Another explanation for the disproportionate number of documents is that each of the new abbots may have sought royal charters to deal with cases. Thirdly, Thorney's smaller size may have made it seem a more tempting target necessitating more appeals for royal support. It is perhaps most likely that some combination of these factors resulted in the relatively high number of charters benefitting Thorney that were issued by Henry II.

Ely also stands out amongst the houses in that its problems were geographically contained. Whilst other houses received royal attention for issues throughout their lands, eight out of ten Ely-related charters were focused on Suffolk holdings. While the problems that Ely complained to Henry II about were in a limited area, they were varied in scope. In three the king drew attention to problems in Orford.⁹⁰⁸ Twice he addressed the abbey's loss of its due Dunwich herrings.⁹⁰⁹ Henry also issued writs regarding the house's rights in the five and a half hundreds of Wicklaw, its mill in Kingston, and its rights in Kentford.⁹¹⁰

The house's problem may have been partially due to the aggrandizing mood of Hugh Bigod.⁹¹¹ During Stephen's reign he had taken every opportunity to advance his position in East Anglia, and that had come at the expense of Ely, as shown by a writ from the second half of Henry II's reign that refers to an agreement made by Bishop Nigel and Earl Hugh during war.⁹¹² Even while Earl Hugh was alive, Henry II intervened on behalf of Ely. In a charter dating from 1156 x June 1159 Henry commanded the earl to "allow the church and monks of Ely to have [their rights] ... in the five and half hundreds [of Wicklow] and Orford port."⁹¹³ The concern for Ely's rights in the hundreds was reiterated in a writ which Vincent judges to be July x September 1155.⁹¹⁴ If this dating is correct, this is the first recorded occasion of Ely bringing the issue to Henry II's attention.⁹¹⁵

Although the other Suffolk charters do not mention Bigod explicitly, he may lie behind some of them, especially those concerning Orford where he is known to have wronged Ely. In 1155 x 1158, Henry II commanded the sheriff(s) of Norfolk and Suffolk to

⁹⁰⁸ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, nos. 824-825, and 830.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 829 and 831.

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, nos. 826, 828, and 839.

⁹¹¹ Andrew Wareham defends the Earl of Norfolk of all but enmity for Stephen, but does not seem to consider this Ely evidence. "The Motives and Politics of the Bigod Family, c.1066-1177" in *Anglo-Norman Studies 17* (Woodbridge, 1995), 235-240.

⁹¹² "In gwerra." *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 834.

⁹¹³ *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 825.

⁹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 826

⁹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 826.

inquire into Ely's rights in the five and a half hundreds and Orford port and uphold what they found.⁹¹⁶ Ely's rights in Orford were also the topic of a writ of c. 1160 in which Henry ordered the bishop of Norwich and his archdeacons to see to it that "if the monks of Ely have been unjustly and without judgment disseised of the parish of Orford ... of which they were seised in the time of my grandfather King Henry" then the wrong should be corrected.⁹¹⁷ This charter makes no mention of who had committed the unjust disseisin, if it existed, but Ely was clearly suffering extensive problems in their Suffolk holdings.

Ely also gained royal help for other assorted wrongs. In one case they were being deprived of their due herrings from Dunwich.⁹¹⁸ This problem may have occurred over an extended period of time when the Honour of Eye was under both Warenne and royal control.⁹¹⁹ One writ concerning the herrings is addressed to Reginald of Warenne and likely dates 1155 x August 1158, and the other commands the king's servants of the honour likely in 1163 x 1166. In addition to these matters, the monks had at some point been deprived of their rightful possession of a mill in Kingston, and Henry ordered the sheriff of Suffolk that he right this wrong.⁹²⁰

The general tenor of all these charters suggests that the monks were in a weak position in their Suffolk holdings. The repeated problems regarding Orford and the repeated mentions of Hugh Bigod are a reminder of the earl's great power in Suffolk which led to Henry commencing a new castle in Orford in 1166.⁹²¹ Finally in Suffolk, the monks valued an ostensibly royal writ emphasizing that Ely had a clear right to its privileges in the five and half hundreds of Wicklow.⁹²² The writ's hand is irregular and the document may be completely spurious, yet its inclusion in an early thirteenth-century cartulary shows that at least at that time and perhaps earlier the monks saw the value of a writ defending their rights in Suffolk.⁹²³

⁹¹⁶ Ibid., no. 824.

⁹¹⁷ "Si monachi de Ely sunt iniuste et sine iudicio dissaisiti de parrochia de Oreford' ... unde saisiti fuerunt tempore regis H(enrici) aui mei." Ibid., no. 830.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid., no. 829.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid., nos. 829 and 831.

⁹²⁰ Ibid., no. 828.

⁹²¹ Brown, R. Allen, "Royal Castle-Building in England, 1154-1216" *English Historical Review*, Vol. 70, No. 276 (Jul., 1955), 353-398, 360.

⁹²² *Charters of Henry II*, eds. Holt and Vincent, no. 839.

⁹²³ "The script of the original is suspicious, having the appearance of a later and deliberate attempt at an 'archaic' style." Ibid., no. 839.

Conclusion to Henry II

The many surviving documents that Henry II issued on behalf of the Fenland houses through 1166 form a fairly clear picture. The houses were troubled by a variety of problems. Some dated back to the reign of Henry I, some originated in Stephen's reign, and a few may have developed under Henry II. Many of the claims on monastic lands were related to heirs staking a claim to donations of their predecessors. However, the category that Henry's charters point out most distinctly is that of wrongs committed during the time of war. Yet even this denomination is not rigorously used by Henry's charters to assign blame. Instead, Henry seemed to be more interested in solving problems: the war was over and he had won. The tone of Henry's charters offer almost unlimited support to the abbeys. Of course this evidence of favor for monastics stems most immediately from the fact that extant charters come from ecclesiastical and not lay cartularies. The writs and charters were ones obtained by the monks; nevertheless, they demonstrate genuine help for beleaguered houses. The monks and prelates must have had the confidence that the king wanted justice to be done and would see to its completion. Eleven years into Henry II's reign the kingdom was at peace. Eleven years into Stephen's reign the country was divided into at least three portions and the monks of Ramsey were working to regain their holdings. Of course the generally positive experience of the kingdom did not mean that the houses were untroubled. Even late into his reign Henry II was issuing charters to support the houses against various problems. Yet these charters suggest that from 1155 to 1166 the Fenland houses were able to rely upon royal help to deal with their need for justice.

Gifts to the Houses

In addition to a house's governance and royal support, donations from the laity were also important a house's prosperity. Yet the Fenland houses' were experiencing a declining rate of acquisitions even before the reign of Henry II. The great day of endowments had long since passed.⁹²⁴ Sandra Raban comments on "the reluctance with which [grants] were often made and the difficulty with which they were retained."⁹²⁵ The houses did gain virgates here and there, but nothing to change their fortunes substantially. Raftis noted that Domesday effectively mapped Ramsey's holdings and the same might be said of Peterborough and

⁹²⁴ See above pages 40ff.

⁹²⁵ Raban, *Estates of Thorney and Crowland*, 36.

Ely.⁹²⁶ As a result, this section will only consider one significant gift, and that was short lived.

In the mid to late 1150s Ely received land in the south of Cambridgeshire for a cell dedicated to Saints James and Leonard.⁹²⁷ The donation was made by Robert, chamberlain to Conan of Brittany and Richmond, and was offered specifically to a monk named Reginald who, along with some others, was already living in the cell on Denny. This island, two parts of Elmeney and assorted other lands were all bestowed on the cell. Conan confirmed this donation. According to a charter of Aubrey Picot, Denny itself was chosen because Elmeney, where Reginald and his fellow monks first resided, was prone to flooding.⁹²⁸ While Elmeney was originally a donation of Henry Picot, Aubrey's father, Aubrey added four and a half acres on Denny in return for a payment of two and half silver marks and twelve pennies. The grant and sale moved property that had been in the hands of both families at least since Domesday when Count Alan and Picot the Sheriff are recorded as the tenants-in-chief of Landbeach.⁹²⁹

These joint donations, or donation and sale, are revealing of the sort of gifts an abbey might receive in the Fens where so much of the land was already in ecclesiastical hands. The donated land was small and prone to flood as alluded to in the charters. This was not altogether bad. Although the low-lying lands were ill suited to building, they might provide good water meadow and the possibility of eels. Domesday records that Count Alan's holding yielded eels.⁹³⁰ In addition to this low-lying land, some problematic holdings were bestowed on the cell. Robert the Chamberlain included the three churches on his lands, Wendy, Wilbraham, and Kirkby. By the mid-twelfth century it was increasingly considered inappropriate for laymen to retain control of churches. So Ely's cell gained land sub-optimal for dwellings or fields and churches that should be held by clerics.

The donation also sheds light on the conflicts of Stephen's reign. Conan's father had been a determined supporter of Stephen's and an enemy of Nigel, as evidenced by the role he played in the arrest of the bishops.⁹³¹ Conan, on the other hand, was supporting a cell of

⁹²⁶ Raftis, *Ramsey*, 21

⁹²⁷ *EEA* 31, no. 42; *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 139, pp. 387-388

⁹²⁸ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 141, pp. 389-390.

⁹²⁹ Cambridgeshire, 195r., Phillimore, 14.59; Cambridgeshire, 201v., Phillimore, 32.38.

⁹³⁰ Cambridgeshire, 195r., Phillimore, 14.59.

⁹³¹ *LE*, ed. Blake, bk. III, ch. 140, p. 389; King, *Stephen*, 107-108 and 135.

Ely's. All this suggests that if there were any enmity between his family and that of Nigel it no longer persisted.⁹³² By the late 1150s, the divisions of Stephen's reign were fading away.

In the end, the cell at Denny benefitted Ely little. Around 1170 the abbey granted it to the Knights Templar as a preceptory.⁹³³ Ely was to receive four silver marks per annum, and they continued to receive money in the form of a pension even after the Templars were destroyed.⁹³⁴ While the value may have been small, the benefits that Robert the chamberlain wanted to bestow on Ely survived in a way.

The short-lived gift of land to Ely shows Ely in peace and even able to expand a bit. The descendants of former enemies, the Earl of Richmond and the Picot the Sheriff, were now making donations to the house, and although there was no great hope for expansion on the horizon, conditions in Ely were improving. For the Fenland houses their immediate future seemed secure with a strong king and a stable realm. As Henry II's charters in general show, he was willing, ready and able to support the houses by issuing charters which covered a range of needs, including pointing out and redressing specific wrongs incurred during the time of war. In addition, the houses could welcome Henry II's delegitimization of Stephen because doing so also delegitimized the wrongs done to them. Closer to home, the houses benefitted from largely competent prelates, a continued potential for small gifts, and an improved financial situation aided by fairs and markets. The troubles of Stephen's reign seem to have dissipated even though they were not forgotten.

⁹³² William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella* The Contemporary History, ed. Edmund King, trans. K. R. Potter (Oxford, 1998), 46. William of Malmesbury attributes the brawl preceding Stephen's arrest of Nigel's uncle and cousin, Roger Bishop of Salisbury and Alexander Bishop of Lincoln, to an altercation between the men of Alan, Conan's father, and those of Roger, Bishop of Salisbury.

⁹³³ *EEA* 31, no. 118.

⁹³⁴ *VCH Cambridgeshire*, ii, 262.

Conclusion

This thesis has considered the experience of the Fenland houses during the reign of Stephen along with the reigns of the previous Anglo-Norman kings and the first twelve years of the reign of Henry II. The addition of documentary to narrative sources expands the study beyond the normal voices of the Fens, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, the *Liber Eliensis*, Hugh Candidus, and occasionally the narratives from Ramsey. In broadening the chronological scope, the study contextualizes the challenges that faced the houses. Understanding the extent of the threats to the well-being of these four monastic foundations sheds light on the often-quoted passage from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E that lamented the rampant wickedness occurring during Stephen's reign.

Overview

This thesis follows a largely chronological order in developing its argument. Chapter one presents the state of the Fenland houses under the first three Norman kings. Domesday records the houses' possessions and shows how unsettled conditions caused loss of lands while recovering from the Conquest. The history of post-Hastings abbots shows how prelates often granted demesne lands to tenants. Overall the abbots' history also shows a shift from more disruptive abbacies to longer uninterrupted terms of office. Finally chapter one considers what sort of gains the houses made in their lands and noted that while the houses never ceased to increase their holdings, the size of donations and purchases was generally small. Although the houses were doing well, they were not experiencing the massive donations associated with periods such as Edgar's revival of Benedictine monasticism.

Chapters two and three together discuss the houses' experience during Stephen's reign. Chapter two notes that many earls, barons, and knights wronged the houses. Some of their wrongs seem to have been based upon claims to family lands. In other cases the guilty parties were trying to deal with consequences of the unrest. Of course, many injuries lack an observable cause. Chapter three considers the second question of the thesis and discusses the role of the Fenland prelates during Stephen's reign. Of the two who were part of national affairs, one, Walter of Ramsey, was likely an unwilling participant. Nigel of Ely had been a curial appointee and made decisions that kept him involved in national politics. His culpability for dragging Ely into the rebellions against Stephen may be lessened on two counts. First, it is possible that the genesis of Nigel's active involvement in rebellion, the arrest of the bishops, was due to court politics rather than Nigel's plotting with Matilda.

Secondly, Geoffrey de Mandeville's invasion of the Fens, which occurred after another court arrest by Stephen, might well have affected Ely even if Nigel had remained in Stephen's good graces. Aside from the occasions when Ely and Ramsey's prelates were at the center of the problems of Stephen's reign, the Fenland prelates were fairly unremarkable. They exhibited common traits both good and bad of twelfth-century prelates. Although they may have sub-tenanted some lands from their abbey demesnes, this was a common vice amongst prelates. If there is a cause to be found for the suffering that the Fenland houses experienced during Stephen's reign, it will not be found in the actions of the prelates.

Finally, chapter four looks at the houses from Henry II's accession until 1166. As in chapter three, their prelates are shown to be largely although not consistently helpful. The chapter principally focuses on the help and support the houses received from Henry II. Royal writs and charters show that the king was responsive when the houses requested aid. Henry II's documents suggest that few new problems arose, and that many wrongs dating to Stephen's reign were addressed. The language of the royal writs and charters emphasizes the instability of the preceding reign. While this is no doubt partially explained as Henry II's attempt to delegitimize Stephen, many of the complaints must have been valid.

This wealth of evidence shows that there are answers, albeit nuanced, to the questions of the thesis: to what extent did the Fenland houses suffer during Stephen's reign, and how culpable were the prelates? In answer to the first question, the houses suffered extensively. The account of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle E* was not largely a twelfth-century author's "perception of ... suffering."⁹³⁵ Lands were taken from churches. Ecclesiastical buildings and even Ramsey's church were violated. Food supplies were threatened. Of course, as has been noted, the whole nineteen years were not unmitigated horrors. Monastic houses were able to improve some buildings and lands. Yet compared to the preceding years under Henry I or the succeeding years under Henry II, Stephen's reign saw a drastic shift in the well-being of the Fenland monasteries. Although the details from the Fens cannot demand Stephen's reign be called "Anarchy" there is no doubt that the Fenland houses experienced a prolonged lack of royal governance incomparable with anything they underwent in the surrounding reigns. As for the question of the prelates' culpability, the answer is somewhat mixed. Nigel of Ely certainly exacerbated his house's problems, but the root of his rebellion lay in Stephen's

⁹³⁵ White, "Myth of Anarchy," 324. Although White allows that wrongs occurred, he seems to mitigate their centrality to Stephen's reign first by prefacing his list of wrongs with disclaimers, "some obvious exaggeration," "proximity to Geoffrey de Mandeville's reign of terror ... may have been unduly influential" and secondly by concluding the paragraph with a focus on "the message [the *ASC-E*] was intended to convey" in contrast to the events it records. White allows some denotative truth in the *ASC-E*'s account, but argues that it is chiefly pro-Angevin propaganda.

arrest of the bishops. While the king's decision may have been a wise move, and while the consequences were certainly not as dire as earlier generations of historians believed, Nigel's revolt most definitely resulted in problems for the monks of Ely. The consequences outlasted the bishop's initial defiance of Stephen and colored the king's interpretation of Geoffrey de Mandeville's Fenland revolt. Aside from Nigel's case it is hard to argue that the problems faced in the Fens were due to prelatial action. Culpability must be sought elsewhere, perhaps at the top.

Historiographical Themes

This thesis also draws conclusions relating to the themes presented in the Introduction: the Church dealing with change, the barons seeking stability, and Stephen struggling to govern. All three can be seen locally in the Fens. In line with scholarship, local evidence suggests that churchmen were active in seeking to bring peace during a tumultuous time.⁹³⁶ Although Nigel of Ely is a notable example against that trend, his actions should be taken as being atypical of ecclesiastics and more akin to those of a baron.⁹³⁷ A better example is Walter of Ramsey who defied the militarization of his abbey to seek peace with Geoffrey de Mandeville. Although Walter was unable to effect the settlement he desired, he made an effort. There is also the peace made between Walter and Nigel during in summer 1141. This agreement elicits comparisons with both ecclesiastical attempts at peace and the well-known series of agreements between barons.⁹³⁸ Since both prelates were lords of much land as well as being the heads of religious houses, they were possibly acting in both capacities.

The prelates were not the only lords to seeking stability in the uncertainty of Stephen's reign. Great lords such as Geoffrey de Mandeville, the Clare earls, and Simon de Senlis all tried to better their precarious situations under the unsettled rule of Stephen. Their efforts came at the expense of monastic houses. Nevertheless there is little sign that the lords were aggressive against any religious houses for reasons other than attempting to replace lost income or to expand during royal weakness. They very much seemed to be making the best of a bad situation and professed a willingness to eventually rectify their wrongs. Whether or not promised repayments would equal the disturbances inflicted upon the wronged monks is a question well beyond the available sources, yet there was at least a stated desire that religious houses not be left suffering. Of course, it was not only the great lords but also middling and

⁹³⁶ Such as Brett, "Warfare."

⁹³⁷ He was also a curial bishop, a type increasingly rare under Henry I and Stephen. Barlow, *The English Church*, 318.

⁹³⁸ King, "Dispute Settlement," 115-130.

lesser barons such as Geoffrey Martel and Robert de Broi who took advantage of the houses.⁹³⁹ These details align with Paul Dalton's ideas that the baronage under Stephen was unpoliced and sought its own good however possible.⁹⁴⁰ Without firm royal governance in the Fens, local lords were able to further their own aims.

It must then be asked, what sort of king was Stephen? The records from the Fens suggest that he aspired to govern firmly but was unable to implement his desires. Stephen attempted to control the Fenland prelates. He was able to defeat Nigel's rebellion and encumbered his return to Ely with payments and perhaps with legal difficulties. Based on the account of Daniel's brief occupancy of Ramsey, Stephen retained the customary habit of Anglo-Norman kings in assigning abbots where he would and receiving payment from them.⁹⁴¹ When Walter did manage to regain control of his house he had to obtain the king's favor through both the queen's advocacy and also monetary gifts. These interactions give the impression of a traditionally powerful king. However the rebellions and the lack of justice that plagued the Fens during his reign gives a less cheerful image of Stephen's agency. Admittedly the Ramsey's history suggests that the later years of Stephen's reign saw increasing peace and stability for the Fens. Nevertheless the evidence concerning Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Hartford suggests that a local bishop was a better guarantor of justice than Stephen and post-1154 documents show that the houses were struggling to rectify injustices into the reign of Henry II.⁹⁴²

Conclusions

Although all these episodes are located in the Fenland and this thesis is not a general study of Stephen's reign, there is evidence that similar troubles were noted elsewhere in the country. The following examples are not meant to imply that experiences comparable in duration and intensity to those of the Fenland houses were recorded throughout all of England, but simply to recognize that wrongs were widespread.

In Sussex, part of England that remained largely under Stephen's control, the house historian of Battle Abbey notes in passing: "When he [Stephen] was in control of the realm ... since the magnates disagreed among themselves, he could not assert his rights in the

⁹³⁹ See above, Chapter 2.

⁹⁴⁰ Paul Dalton, "William Earl of York," 155-165; "Aiming at the impossible," 109-134; "*In Neutro Latere*," 39-59; and "Eustace fitzJohn," 358-383.

⁹⁴¹ See above, pp. 88-89.

⁹⁴² See above, p. 71 and Chapter 4.

country without devastating insurrections which this is not the time to recall.”⁹⁴³ Although the Battle account is unconcerned with relaying particulars of the warfare, he recognized the extensive consequences of Stephen’s inability to govern the kingdom. At the other end of the kingdom, in Yorkshire, the historian of Selby was less concerned with national problems than the warfare that affected his own house.⁹⁴⁴ He refers to the time of Abbot Elias Paynel, 1143-1153, as a “time of warlike strife” in which the abbey was threatened.⁹⁴⁵ More details of the conflict in and around Selby reveal that members of the laity fled into the church to escape fighting, the church building was itself threatened, and multiple non-combatants were kidnapped and held hostage for ransom.⁹⁴⁶ In the north of England, even where the earl was a royalist supporter, Stephen’s reign was marred by violence. Finally, some of the sharpest criticism appears in the history of John of Worcester. He notes the presence of “much discord throughout England and Normandy and the bonds of peace were torn apart. Each man rose against his fellow”⁹⁴⁷ While that comment was impersonal and offers no individual blame he later added that “from this [preceding violence and wrongs] anyone can see how little foresight and with what feeble power, with what injustice rather than justice due from rulers, England is governed.”⁹⁴⁸ This attack on Stephen’s government does not deny the king’s legitimacy, simply his competence. John’s account tallies with that of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E when discussing torture and violence against monastic houses.⁹⁴⁹ It also focuses on the destruction of churches, both parish and monastic, in Nottingham and Winchester.⁹⁵⁰ These accounts from the West Country support the Chronicle’s grim view beyond the Fenland accounts. Since John of Worcester’s history finished before Geoffrey de Mandeville’s arrest and rebellion, he cannot simply be extrapolating the horrors of Ramsey to England at large. The histories from Battle, Selby, and Worcester seem to corroborate the often-cheerless histories from the Fens.

All this strife emphasizes Stephen’s limited ability to keep the peace. Although that was a key duty of medieval monarchs, Stephen signally failed to provide a stable country. Not only was he unable to stop those who broke the peace, they were also often his own supporters. Simply considering the highest tier of Anglo-Norman society provides examples

⁹⁴³ *The Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, ed. and trans. Eleanor Searle (Oxford, 1980), 141.

⁹⁴⁴ *Historia Selebiensis Monasterii* The History of the Monastery of Selby, ed. and trans., Janet Burton and Lynda Lockyer (Oxford, 2013).

⁹⁴⁵ *Historia Selebiensis*, 98-99.

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 98-103, 110ff.

⁹⁴⁷ *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. iii, ed. and trans. P. McGurk (Oxford, 1998), 217.

⁹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 249-251, 285-287.

⁹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 291-293, 299-301.

such as Hugh Bigod and Simon de Senlis. The first adhered to Stephen early in his reign and then made his own way in East Anglia. Simon de Senlis remained loyal to Stephen his whole life. Both wronged monastic houses with no recorded redress until the reign of Henry II. Stephen also seems to have failed to support justice inasmuch as court cases, and royal writs seem less common under him than Henry I or Henry II. Whether this was because royal courts of justice and the royal court were not always available or because the Fens were not accessible to courts, the Fenland houses suffered in either case. These failings seem likely to apply to some other parts of the country as well.

Finally Stephen's interactions with barons he did not trust seem to have led to some of the worst problems of the Fens. Some of Ely's problems arose after the arrest of the bishops. In addition, the arrest of Geoffrey de Mandeville had a significant effect on the Fens. In another case Stephen's arrest of Ranulf of Chester likely led to the wrongs of Earl Gilbert of Hereford. Whether or not Stephen was justified in these arrests has little bearing on the argument. His prosecution of the cases followed by the release of men who swiftly rebelled seems remarkably incompetent. Making such a mistake once might be understandable, but Stephen took the same action on at least three occasions.

These conclusions referencing widespread violence also address a tangential point in studies of Stephen's reign, terminology. "Anarchy" has long been avoided in scholarship and has been largely replaced with "Civil War." This term may not be incredibly more accurate than "Anarchy." "Civil War" conjures up images of two sides: Stephen against Matilda. In reality the situation was far less black and white. The men who wronged the Fenland house were rarely if ever partisans of Matilda. Some, such as the Clares, were discontented royalists. Others, such as Robert Grimbold with connections to both the Scottish Earls of Huntingdon and also Stephen, could scarcely be considered strong Angevin supporters. And of course Geoffrey de Mandeville, the most notorious of the wrongdoers, was close to Stephen before the arrest and seems unconnected to the Angevin cause. While no term can easily replace "Civil War," its use should be limited to instances where Stephen and Matilda's sides faced off, rather than being used as a catch-all term to describe all the unrest of Stephen's reign.

And the unrest returns this thesis to the Fenland abbeys and the question of their suffering. Was it in any way "Anarchy" in the Fens? Of course the answer lies in definitions. There was no utter lack of law that could be termed "anarchy." However, there were certainly periods when Stephen's will was defied and the houses could not rely upon the king for justice. Stephen's inability to keep peace, off and on during the nineteen years, created enough problems that that time was commonly referred to as *tempus guerraee* and needed

nothing further to define it. Stephen's lack of control led to overall worse conditions that made normal problems harder to solve and encouraged more problems to arise. As this thesis has shown, the Fens did suffer more difficulties than normal during the nineteen years of Stephen's reign, the prelates of the monastic houses were only partially culpable, and indeed Stephen deserves his reputation as a poor king.

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