HISTORY AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

This is a fascinating study of religious culture in England from 1050 to 1250. Drawing on the wealth of material about religious belief and practice that survives in the chronicles, Carl Watkins explores accounts of signs, prophecies, astrology, magic, beliefs about death and the miraculous and demonic. He challenges some of the prevailing assumptions about religious belief, questioning in particular the attachment of many historians to terms such as ‘clerical’ and ‘lay’, ‘popular’ and ‘elite’, ‘Christian’ and ‘pagan’ as explanatory categories. The evidence of the chronicles is also set in its broader context through explorations of miracle collections, penitential manuals, *exempla* and sermons. The book traces shifts in the way the supernatural was conceptualised by learned writers and the ways in which broader patterns of belief evolved during this period. This original account sheds important new light on belief during a period in which the religious landscape was transformed.

Carl Watkins is Lecturer in Central Medieval History at the Faculty of History, Cambridge University, and Fellow of Magdalene College.
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HISTORY AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

C. S. WATKINS
For my mother and in memory of my father
## CONTENTS

*Preface*  
*Note on the text*  
*List of abbreviations*

### INTRODUCTION

1. THINKING ABOUT THE SUPERNATURAL  
2. INVENTING PAGANS  
3. PRAYERS, SPELLS AND SAINTS  
4. SPECIAL POWERS AND MAGICAL ARTS  
5. IMAGINING THE DEAD  
6. THINKING WITH THE SUPERNATURAL

### CONCLUSION

*Bibliography*  
*Index*
More debts have been accumulated before and during the (rather too many) years of this book’s preparation for justice to be done to them in a short preface, but a number stand out for special mention. The first are to those who interested me in medieval history when I came up to Cambridge as an undergraduate: Christine Carpenter, Rosamond McKitterick and Sandra Raban. More recently, I have profited greatly from the wise advice of many scholars, especially Valerie Flint, Jonathan Riley-Smith and Miri Rubin. Magdalene College, where this book was begun during a research fellowship and where I have finally finished it as a teaching fellow, has proved the most congenial of environments in which to think and work. Special mention must be made of my immediate colleagues at Magdalene, Eamon Duffy, who kindly read and commented on sections of the book in early drafts, and Tim Harper, for the help they have rendered over the years. Seminars in Norwich, London, Bristol and Aberystwyth have offered further indispensable opportunities to test ideas, expose false assumptions and absorb invaluable advice. The manuscript of the book has benefited from the sharp eyes of a number of readers. My former research student Tom Licence bravely read the whole and saved me from many errors and infelicities. It hardly needs to be said that the remaining deficiencies of substance and style are the work of the author alone. Two final and very substantial debts remain to be acknowledged. The first is proclaimed by the dedication; the other is to Dr Martin Brett, who supervised the PhD dissertation on which this book is based and commented on drafts as it developed. What follows has been too long in the making but it would scarcely have been begun without his unfailing and patient guidance.
NOTE ON THE TEXT

Chapter 5 of this book draws on material which first appeared in ‘Sin, Penance and Purgatory in the Anglo-Norman Realm: the Evidence of Visions and Ghost Stories’, Past and Present, 175 (2002), 3–33. This chapter represents further reflection on, and expansion of, these ideas.

In the case of Nelson Medieval Texts and Oxford Medieval Texts, translations used here are those of the editors unless otherwise specified in footnotes.
ABBREVIATIONS


EHR *English Historical Review*

DNB *New Dictionary of National Biography*


JEH *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*


List of abbreviations

Layamon
Layamon’s Brut: or Chronicle of Britain, a poetical semi-Saxon paraphrase of the Brut of Wace, now first published from the Cottonian manuscripts in the British Museum, accompanied by a literal translation, notes and a grammatical glossary, ed. F. Madden (London, 1847).

Map

Melrose Chronicle

OV

Peterborough Chronicle

PL

RC
Ralph of Coggeshall, Radulphi de Coggeshall Chronicon Anglicanum, ed. J. Stevenson (RS, 1875).

RD

RH

RT

TRHS
Transactions of the Royal Historical Society

WM, GP

WM, GR

WN

WP