CHAPTER I

Introduction

Rory Naismith and David A. Woodman

Writing, Kingship and Power

Kings engaged with writing of one sort or another from the very earliest stages of recorded Anglo-Saxon history. Bede, in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, famously told of how Æthelberht I, king of Kent (d. 616/17), 'established with the advice of his counsellors a code of laws after the Roman manner . . . these are written in English and are still kept and observed by the people.'[1] Letters were also addressed to Æthelberht by Pope Gregory I and to Edwin of Northumbria (616–33) by Pope Boniface V and Pope Honorius I,[2] while Æthelberht's son, Eadbald (616/17–40), issued the first known coins inscribed with the name of an English king,[3] and later in the seventh century the earliest charters were produced in the names of Anglo-Saxon kings.[4] What seems to have been the first literary text directly addressed to a king was the *Epistola ad Acircium*, a sprawling assortment of grammatical and related texts put together by Aldhelm of Malmesbury (d. 709/10) for his old friend 'who rules over the northern lands': Aldfrith, king of the Northumbrians (685–704).[5] Bede's *Historia* was also of course dedicated to a king of the Northumbrians (Ceolwulf (729–37)) and had much more to say on kings and kingship than Aldhelm's learned treatise. But it was to be some

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[1] 'Decreta illi iudiciorum iuxta exempla Romanorum cum consilio sapientium constituit; quae conscripta Anglorum sermone hactenus habentur et obseruantur ab ea': Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* [hereafter *HE*] ii. 5, in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 150–1.

[2] Bede, *HE* i. 32, ii. 10 and 17 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 110–15, 166–71 and 194–7).

[3] M. Blackburn, 'Two New Types of Anglo-Saxon Gold Shillings', in *Coinage and History in the North Sea World, c. AD 500–1250: Essays in Honour of Marion Archibald*, ed. B. Cook and G. Williams (Leiden, 2006), pp. 127–40, at 127–35.

[4] S 7–8 (*CantStA* 6, *CantCC* 2). For context, see P. Wormald, 'Bede and the Conversion of England: The Charter Evidence', in his *The Times of Bede: Studies* in *Early English Christian Society and Its Historian*, ed. S. Baxter (Oxford, 2006), pp. 135–66.

[5] 'Aquilonalis imperii sceptra gubernanti': Aldhelm, *Epistola ad Acircium,* in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. R. Ehwald, MGH Auct. antiq. 15 (Berlin, 1919), p. 61. On the relationship between Aldfrith and Aldhelm, see M. Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', *ASE* 36 (2007), 15–69, at 22–6.

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time before texts at least ostensibly produced by a king appeared in Anglo-Saxon England. Alfred the Great (871–99) certainly played a major part in a series of Old English adaptations of Latin texts, though the nature and extent of his involvement remain contentious.[6] And even if writings by kings were to remain exceptional, England in the tenth and eleventh centuries saw the bond between writing and power go from strength to strength.

All of this is to say that writing and kingship enjoyed a long and successful partnership in Anglo-Saxon England. There were many ways in which writing, kingship and power came together, leading to just as many ways in which one might write about kingship and power. This parallel is not solely a modern contrivance, and neither of course is it one restricted to Anglo-Saxon England.[7] Kings themselves could use the written word for their own ends; equally, others could employ writing to interact with kings or think about various kinds of authority. The results of these two processes can be difficult to distinguish, and that was often the point: expressing and invoking authority could look much the same in practice. Adopting the position of the king, or even the voice of the king, could lend strength to a document or historical narrative,[8] especially if written by an agency with close ties to the throne – or by one that sought to cultivate such ties.[9] This fluid use of writing is the central process which the contributors to this volume seek to examine from various angles. One way was simply by association. Written invocation of the king's name and his implied seal of approval carried weight, not least in the case of the Alfredian translations, which were, of course, the work of long-dead Latin authors, albeit carefully mediated. Yet even attachment of the name of a king or

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[6] Malcolm Godden has challenged the authorship of Alfred the Great: see (*inter alia*) 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', *MÆ* 76 (2007), 1–23. For the counter-argument, see D. Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge, 2007); and D. Pratt, 'Problems of Authorship and Audience in the Writings of King Alfred the Great', in *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, ed. P. Wormald and J. L. Nelson (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 162–91.

[7] Even sticking to the early Middle Ages, there is a great deal of literature (especially from the 1980s onwards) on the theme of writing and power elsewhere in Europe. For just a small selection of important scholarship, see P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (eds.), *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds, 1977); R. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge, 1989); N. Everett, *Literacy in Lombard Italy, c. 568–774* (Cambridge, 2003); P. E. Schramm and F. Mütherich, *Denkmale der deutschen Könige und Kaiser*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1962–78); N. Staubach, *Rex christianus: Hofkultur und Herrschaftspropaganda im Reich Karls des Kahlen* (Cologne, 1993); and H. Hoffmann, *Buchkunst und Königtum im ottonischen und frühsalischen Reich*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1986).

[8] L. Roach, 'Penitential Discourse in the Diplomas of King Æthelred "the Unready"', *JEH* 64 (2013), 258–76; and S. Keynes, 'Church Councils, Royal Assemblies, and Anglo-Saxon Royal Diplomas', in *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. G. R. Owen-Crocker and B. W. Schneider (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 1–182, on conditions of charter production.

[9] For a recent case-study, see D. Pratt, 'The Voice of the King in "King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries"', *ASE* 41 (2012), 145–204.

other powerful figure to a text begs the question of why the author turned to those individuals and how the endorsement might have been constitutive as well as reflective of power. This is just one of many questions raised by the central issue of the written word's relationship to power. How could it be harnessed to exert and conceptualise power in Anglo-Saxon England? What strengths did different forms of writing have, and in which contexts would they be employed? A charter did not do the same job as a chronicle, and a church dedication inscription did not do the same job as a praise poem. What did writers in all these contexts stand to gain from engaging with royal authority in particular? And how did that authority interface with divine power or the roles of the Church, bishops and other powerful laypeople?

Answers to some of these questions can be found in the chapters making up this volume, but it is first worth digging a little deeper on the nature of the sources at our disposal. The historian is of necessity bound to study what survives, and especially what survives in written form. Much therefore depends on how representative that surviving sample might be. Churches played a central role in both making and preserving documents and codices. Nothing beyond brief runic inscriptions survives from before Christianisation in the seventh century, and whatever still exists from then onwards had to pass through many filters in order to enter an ecclesiastical library or archive and survive to modern times. Naturally, materials produced by or relating to the Church loom large, and appropriately so, for bishops, monasteries and the rest of the ecclesiastical infrastructure were a major force in society and closely involved (sometimes to the point of blurring boundaries) with kings and secular authority.[10] But one always has to be on guard against the possibility that what the surviving record presents is shaped by its ecclesiastical context of production and preservation. It is only by good fortune, for instance, that the famous Fonthill Letter – crucial for knowledge of how local society might interface with royal authority in the decades around 900 – survives, bearing on its dorse the word *inutile* ('useless').[11] One must be wary in reading these texts too. Early medieval writers were informed by a rich literary and intellectual tradition, laden with symbolism. With regard to 'rituals', for example, it can and has been argued in recent scholarship that any coronation, council, speech, display of loyalty or other act might be manipulated in the telling

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[10] This issue, with reference to charters, is explored in F. M. Stenton, *The Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period* (Oxford, 1955). For wider relations between the Church and the rest of society, see now H. Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Theology and Society in an Age of Faith* (Farnham, 2013).

[11] S 1445 (*CantCC* 104).

to make a political point or as a literary nod to similar gestures in earlier literature. However, clerics clearly expected audiences to understand and react to comments on rituals, implying their prevalence and importance, while kings and other laypeople were as saturated in the same Christian culture as their friends, neighbours and brothers in the Church – so much so that their own acts might well have been very symbolically conscious too.[12] This is too large an area to discuss in any detail; all that need be stressed here is that extant sources reflect a symbiotic relationship between writing and power. The written record is our primary source for establishing what power consisted of; influence over that record, therefore, was a core component of power.

But writing arguably stops short of actually being power: it was reactions to writing that mattered. 'Power' is a loose concept, used here as shorthand for the capacity to exert one's will over others, whether directly or through the agency of others.[13] It was the ability to get things done. There are further dimensions which muddy the waters, however. Those who occupy a position of power are paradoxically not always able to act as they desire because of the expectations of those over whom they exert 'power', not least when that position took the form of an institution with a ready-made bundle of responsibilities, such as kingship. The responsibilities of kingship constrained individual holders of the position at the same time as it empowered them. King Heremod in *Beowulf* fell from his position when he stopped distributing gifts to win the support of his men, for example.[14] The message the poet apparently sought to convey with this parable was that when the king stopped behaving like a king, he stopped being a king. Power was a two-way process, created and maintained by people buying into it, existing in the imagination of ruled and ruler alike. It was fed by reactions as well as actions, and therein lies the disconnect between writing

[12] Very different views are taken of the interpretation of these acts by P. Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, NJ, 2001); G. Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Medieval Europe*, trans. C. Carroll (Cambridge, 2004); G. Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY, 1992); G. Koziol, *The Politics of Memory and Identity in Carolingian Royal Diplomas: The West Frankish Kingdom (840–987)* (Turnhout, 2012); also, for Anglo-Saxon context, see J. Barrow, 'Demonstrative Behaviour and Political Communication in Later Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 36 (2007), 127–50; L. Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871–978* (Cambridge, 2013), esp. pp. 161–211; and C. Insley, 'Charters, Ritual and Late Tenth-Century English Kingship', in *Gender and Historiography: Studies in the Earlier Middle Ages in Honour of Pauline Stafford*, ed. J. L. Nelson, S. Reynolds and S. M. Johns (London, 2012), pp. 75–89.

[13] This interpretation stems ultimately from M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, trans. E. Fischoff, 2 vols. (Berkeley, CA, 1978–9).

[14] *Beowulf* 1709–22a, in *Klaeber's Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Toronto, 2008), p. 58.

and power. How could writing create or benefit from power in a world of highly restricted literacy?

It is an axiom of scholarship that literacy was very limited in the early Middle Ages.[15] Reading and especially writing were largely the preserve of the clergy, at least in England. These skills were not in themselves essential for appreciating the value of written documents, and in Anglo-Saxon England, widespread use of the vernacular made the written word still more accessible.[16] Nevertheless, there are precious few documents or literary texts likely to be the work of laypeople. Most examples relate to the highest elite. Alfred the Great was mentioned earlier, and one might add to the list two ealdormen: Ordlaf and Æthelweard, who are presented as authors of the Fonthill Letter and of a Latin chronicle, respectively.[17] There are also very many texts that openly proclaim royal patronage or a royal audience, among them the letters written to the recently converted Christian kings of the seventh century. The contents of these elegant Latin missives must have been mediated to Æthelberht and Edwin through translation. Writing, in short, generated discussion.

This aspect of the written word – the text beyond the text – was probably far more important than can be divined from the surviving written record alone. It is not unreasonable to suppose that most texts read or translated for the benefit of the king would be heard and discussed by some portion of his counsellors; similarly, directives emanating from the king would commonly be read aloud to gatherings of worthies and were not necessarily

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[15] M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066–1307*, 3rd edn (Chichester, 2013); and R. McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990).

[16] In addition to the works just cited, see also K. A. Lowe, 'Lay Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and the Development of the Chirograph', in *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts and Their Heritage*, ed. P. Pulsiano and E. Treharne (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 161–204. On English and Latin, see Chapter 14 in this volume.

[17] For Ordlaf and the Fonthill Letter (for which see further below), see S. D. Keynes, 'The Fonthill Letter', in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Korhammer (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 53–97, at 55; also M. Boynton and S. Reynolds, 'The Author of the Fonthill Letter', *ASE* 25 (1997), 91–5; and N. P. Brooks, 'The Fonthill Letter, Ealdorman Ordlaf and Anglo-Saxon Law in Practice', in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. S. Baxter, C. E. Karkov, J. L. Nelson and D. A. E. Pelteret (Aldershot, 2009), pp. 301–18. For Æthelweard, see the edition of his *Chronicon* in, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (London, 1962); and also M. Gretsch, 'Historiography and Literary Patronage in Late Anglo-Saxon England: The Evidence of Æthelweard's Chronicon', *ASE* 41 (2012), 205–48. For royal patronage of books and writing, see (*inter alia*) D. Pratt, 'Kings and Books in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 43 (2014), 297–377; and S. Keynes, 'King Athelstan's Books', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 143–201.

accepted uncritically.[18] Writing, talk and action all informed one another. From meetings of the powerful it is very likely that knowledge of texts' contents would percolate out into the wider consciousness, perhaps spiced with gossip and speculation that accumulated in the telling.[19] Yet it remains true that the immediate, intended audience of many written texts was small and specific, dictated by the circumstances under which they were produced. Quality mattered much more than quantity: getting through to the king, bishop or ealdorman must often have mattered much more than the number of also-rans (or indeed later scholars) who might read or hear of the text. Just a tiny number of copies could have been made of some of the most fascinating early medieval texts such as Asser's *Life* of Alfred, the *Encomium Emmae reginae*, and most letters.

Writing, in other words, was a powerful tool when used in connection with kingship but could function in many different ways. Some of the most elaborate and ambitious texts were razor sharp in their nuance and highly targeted in their intended readership. Inscriptions on coins, conversely, boiled down the essentials of royal status into a brief, epigraphic form, rarely extending to more than the name and title of the king. Yet coin inscriptions were combined with visual and material invocations of power and probably had wider reach than any other written manifestation of royal authority. If extended texts were the rapier, coin inscriptions were the mace. Students, colleagues and friends of Simon Keynes will remember the trinity proclaimed by him in numerous lectures: that charters, law-codes and coins are central to an understanding of government and institutions in Anglo-Saxon England and can add much to the narratives presented by chronicles and histories. It is in this spirit that the contributions to this volume have been assembled, to showcase and explore the different media and techniques of writing with which Anglo-Saxons conceived kingship and power. They have been broken down into three loose sections. The first, 'The Formation of Power: The Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms', includes chapters that examine the pre-viking period of Anglo-Saxon history. It is a powerful reflection of the richness of early Northumbrian

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[18] S. D. Keynes, 'Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Uses of Literacy*, ed. McKitterick, pp. 226–57; D. Pratt, 'Written Law and the Communication of Authority in Tenth-Century England', in *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century*, ed. C. Leyser, D. W. Rollason and H. Williams (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 331–50; and L. Roach, 'Law Codes and Legal Norms in Later Anglo-Saxon England', *Historical Research* 86 (2013), 465–86.

[19] See, for select comparative perspectives, C. Wickham, 'Gossip and Resistance among the Medieval Peasantry', *Past & Present* 160 (1998), 3–24; T. Fenster and D. L. Smail (eds.), *Fama: The Politics of Talk & Reputation in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, 2003); and C. West, 'Visions in a Ninth-Century Village: An Early Medieval Microhistory', *History Workshop Journal* 81 (2016), 1–16.

sources that two of the four contributions in this section focus on the
northern kingdom: Sarah Foot addresses 'Bede's Kings', while David
Woodman considers 'Hagiography and Charters in Early Northumbria'.
In doing so, they call attention to the strengths and weaknesses of
Northumbrian material, which is exceptionally strong in historical and
hagiographical texts but more limited in its representation of charters and
other administrative documents. The third chapter in this section, 'Origins
of the Kingdom of the English', by David Dumville, takes a *longue durée*
approach to the establishment of the components of royal government in
England. Zooming in for a particular case-study, Jinty Nelson ('Losing the
Plot? "Filthy Assertion" and "Unheard-of Deceit" in Codex Carolinus 92')
considers a cluster of letters that illuminate the complex links between
England, Francia and Rome in the late eighth century.

   The second and third sections of this book both concern tenth- and
eleventh-century England, a period that is overall richer and more balanced
in its range of source material. Yet important challenges remain in deciding
how to interpret and combine these texts and the best framework into
which they should be set. For this reason, they are divided into a section on
'Authority and Its Articulation in Late Anglo-Saxon England', which
consists of chapters on the political and institutional dimensions of king-
ship, power and writing in later Anglo-Saxon England, and a section on
'Books, Texts and Power', which assembles contributions approaching the
theme from a more linguistic or literary point of view, often with specific
reference to surviving manuscripts. Division into these sections should not
be taken to suggest that there are no connections between their contents;
on the contrary, the two depend closely on each other, with numerous
parallels in methodology and subject matter. The second section contains
five chapters. Pauline Stafford's 'Fathers and Daughters: The Case of
Æthelred II' presents a case-study of female power and its exercise at the
highest levels during the reign of Æthelred II (978–1016). Rory Naismith,
in 'The Historian and Anglo-Saxon Coinage: The Case of Late Anglo-
Saxon England', considers how the celebrated monetary system of the later
tenth and eleventh centuries should be understood as part of an evolving
governmental and political scene, while David Pratt looks at some of the
other mechanics related to this, specifically those of the precocious *geld*
taxation system, in 'Charters and Exemption from Geld in Anglo-Saxon
England'. Katy Cubitt, in 'On Living in the Time of Tribulation:
Archbishop Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* and Its Eschatological
Context', examines Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi* within the broader context of
his apocalyptic writings, while Levi Roach, in 'A Tale of Two Charters:

Diploma Production and Political Performance in Æthelredian England',
focuses on charters from the reign of Æthelred II as snapshots of key
turning points in his reign.

The third and final group of chapters approaches the writing of kingship
and power from a slightly different perspective, driven by literary and
manuscript considerations. Helen Foxhall Forbes and Julia Crick move
the discussion to how religion intersected with society, specifically in the
forms (respectively) of a re-evaluation of judicial ordeals in late Anglo-
Saxon England ('Making Manifest God's Judgement: Interpreting Ordeals
in Late Anglo-Saxon England') and an analysis of an unusual prayerbook
showing signs of female use ('An Eleventh-Century PrayerBook for
Women? The Origins and History of the Galba PrayerBook'). Finally,
Francesca Tinti brings in the well-known linguistic dynamic of writing and
authority in Anglo-Saxon England in a study of the numerous bilingual
(Latin and Old English) leases from Worcester ('Writing Latin and Old
English in Tenth-Century England: Patterns, Formulae and Language
Choice in the Leases of Oswald of Worcester').

As a group, these chapters touch on a broad range of topics. Recurring
themes include the multi-faceted roles of charters and the centrality of the
reign of Æthelred II as a time when crisis drove experimentation. Related
to both topics is the influence of the Church and religious devotion in
power relations, creating an arena in which earthly and heavenly authority
could interact in complex fashion. All combine to present a well-rounded
and innovative view of how power (especially royal power) and writing
intermeshed in England; in addition, all reflect very well the incisive and
diverse scholarship of Simon Keynes and the profound impact he has had
on the contributors to this volume and on the field as a whole. It is to
Simon and his particular contribution to the field that we now turn.

Simon Keynes and Anglo-Saxon Charter Scholarship

In the Preface to his groundbreaking 1980 book,[20] Simon Keynes discussed
the importance of the new edition – begun under the joint auspices of the
British Academy and the Royal Historical Society – of every single surviv-
ing Anglo-Saxon charter. At that stage, only two such volumes had
appeared in print, one by Professor A. Campbell and the other by

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[20] S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready': A Study in Their Use as Historical Evidence*
(Cambridge, 1980).

Professor P. H. Sawyer.[21] Even if the first of these volumes did not quite do justice to the material,[22] they nevertheless collectively demonstrated the 'intrinsic interest' of the enterprise and the possibilities offered in the study of Anglo-Saxon charters.[23] Of all scholars, Keynes understood the necessity of studying Anglo-Saxon charters first and foremost in the context of the archive in which they had been preserved. It was only against this background that the authenticity of these documents, so often hotly debated, could be properly gauged. If the idiosyncrasies of a particular archive as a whole were known, one could begin to build a picture of the likelihood of any individual document being genuine. So while one might be naturally suspicious of charters surviving at Malmesbury,[24] one could be more accepting of the few northern charters preserved in York Minster.[25]

The questions that demand to be asked of any one archive are numerous and complicated. For an archive to be properly understood, an editor has to be intimately acquainted with the relevant manuscripts. If confronted by a cartulary, an editor has to form an opinion of the copying practices of the scribe(s) in question. Were the texts of Anglo-Saxon charters faithfully preserved, or were elements changed during the copying process? Can the tenurial patterns shown in Domesday Book help in an assessment of the shape an archive might be expected to take? In some cases, as with the Abingdon or Malmesbury archives, the charters themselves are inextricably linked (and literally incorporated) with narrative material, making their assessment all the more difficult.[26] In fact, every archive offers its own issues of interpretation. Nothing can be taken for granted, and it is only after gaining familiarity with the material that one can begin to form opinions about the individual documents. With the archival context in mind, an editor can then start to criticise each charter on its own merits, comparing it with charters of similar date, to see what details of diplomatic or history it preserves and how it can be used in

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[21] *Charters of Rochester*, ed. A. Campbell, AS Charters I (London, 1973), and *Charters of Burton Abbey*, ed. P. H. Sawyer, AS Charters II (Oxford, 1979). Once finished, there will be some forty volumes in the series. For Keynes' own role at the forefront of this project, making sure that it has remained funded and viable, see further below.

[22] N. P. Brooks, 'Review of *Charters of Rochester*', *EHR* 90 (1975), 626–7.

[23] The phrase is borrowed from Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. xiii.

[24] See *Charters of Malmesbury Abbey*, ed. S. E. Kelly, AS Charters XI (Oxford, 2005), pp. 51–64, with discussion of the group known as the 'Decimation' charters at 65–91.

[25] *Charters of Northern Houses*, ed. D. A. Woodman, AS Charters 16 (Oxford, 2012), pp. 9–18.

[26] *Charters of Abingdon Abbey*, Part I, ed. S. E. Kelly, AS Charters VII (Oxford, 2000); with *Historia Ecclesie Abbendonensis; The History of the Church of Abingdon*, vol. I, ed. J. Hudson (Oxford, 2007); and Kelly, *Charters of Malmesbury*.

conjunction with a wider array of sources. Such judgements are of a palaeographical, linguistic, historical and diplomatic kind.

Given the very large amount of endeavour and wide array of skills needed to master such material, it may have seemed premature in 1980, with only two British Academy editions published, for Keynes to embark on a study of diplomas outside of their archival context for the reign of a particular king (and looking back to the reigns of previous Anglo-Saxon kings). Keynes himself recognised this problem, saying, 'It may seem a rash venture to produce a study of Anglo-Saxon royal diplomas at the outset of the new edition, when the texts collectively are still in the process of being securely established and properly criticized for the first time.'[27] But what followed was a book that truly opened up new ways for charters to be appreciated and exploited by Anglo-Saxonists. As recently as 1970, Professor F. Barlow, in writing his biography of Edward the Confessor, had expressed his disquiet in trusting the 'scrappy and recalcitrant . . . governmental records' surviving from the Confessor's reign. His disquiet rested on two counts: that such documents were drawn up by the beneficiaries of the grants and that they were therefore second-hand accounts of royal action, divorced from the realities of court life.[28] These were very serious methodological problems.[29] Students and scholars of Anglo-Saxon kingship were left unsure of the exact status of the Anglo-Saxon charter. Ostensibly records issued by kings, they were being considered as accounts that did not originate at the centre of royal government but rather as summaries written by those who often had vested interests in the transactions described. The problem was compounded by the nature of the survival of charters, the vast majority of which are preserved only as later copies in cartularies and always in the archives of a religious house. This meant that in combination with some of the clearly religious elements of the documents themselves (especially the proem and sanction), charters had a distinctly ecclesiastical aspect, taking them further and further away from the royal court in which they purported to belong.

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[27] Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. xiii.   [28] F. Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (London, 1970), pp. xxi–xxii.
[29] In making these points, Barlow cites especially the work of P. Chaplais, who wrote a series of important articles concerning the production of Anglo-Saxon charters: P. Chaplais, 'The Origin and Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diploma', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* iii(2) (1965), 48–61; and P. Chaplais, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chancery: From the Diploma to the Writ', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* iii(4) (1966), 160–76, both reprinted in *Prisca Munimenta: Studies in Archival and Administrative History Presented to Dr A. E. J. Hollaender*, ed. F. Ranger (London, 1973).