

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-40222-5 - Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries

Edited by F. E. Harmer

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Introduction to the Paperback Edition

It has long been recognised that Anglo-Saxon charters are fundamental to our understanding of the social, agrarian, ecclesiastical, institutional and political history of the English peoples from the late seventh century to the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. The surviving texts, in Latin and in the vernacular, were first brought together and edited by John Mitchell Kemble, in his *Codex Diplomaticus Ævi Saxonici* (1839–48), superseded, for the period to 975, by Walter de Gray Birch's *Cartularium Saxonicum* (1885–93). It was soon recognised, however, that even these great monuments of scholarship did not do justice to the complexity and significance of the material. New standards of editing and commentary were set by A. S. Napier and W. H. Stevenson, in their edition of a small collection of charters which had been formed in the eighteenth century but which only came to light when acquired by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, in 1891; and it became clear that the work would have to start again.

In 1912 Hector Munro Chadwick (1870–1947) succeeded W. W. Skeat as Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon, in the University of Cambridge. It was Chadwick who conceived the idea of a new edition, with translations and detailed notes, of all the surviving charters in the vernacular, as a contribution towards the larger objective. Over the years which followed, three of his pupils took up the challenge. The first volume to appear was Florence Harmer's edition of *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1914). War intervened, and in the early 1920s attention turned to the preparation of two volumes of early English law-codes. The second volume of vernacular charters was Dorothy Whitelock's edition of *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge, 1930), followed in due course by Agnes Jane Robertson's edition of *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (Cambridge, 1939; 2nd ed., 1956). The series was completed some years later by Harmer's *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, published by Manchester University Press in 1952 (reprinted in 1989).

A multi-volume edition of the entire corpus of charters – each volume of which presents the charters formerly preserved in the archives of a particular religious house (or group of houses) – is now in progress, published under the auspices of the British Academy–Royal Historical Society Joint Committee on Anglo-Saxon Charters (Oxford, 1973–). The new edition includes charters which have been brought to light in the past fifty years, and incorporates more detailed discussion of each text in its appropriate

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contexts. Yet the volumes produced as part of Chadwick's series will long retain their value, and all working in the wide field of Anglo-Saxon studies will have cause for their different reasons to be grateful that 'Harmer', 'Whitelock' and 'Robertson' should have been made readily accessible again by the Cambridge University Press.

The vernacular charters, as a group, are inseparable from the much larger corpus of documents in Latin, in the sense that all forms of documentation have to be taken together as the surviving products of the complex practices which sustained the kingdoms and societies of Anglo-Saxon England. The Latin and vernacular charters show, in combination, how use of the written word penetrated and indeed permeated all levels of government and society, though never to the exclusion of other practices; and it is only by understanding one form of documentation in relation to others that the full potential of the written evidence can be realised. Yet the surviving vernacular charters also stand together as a distinct group of texts, which can be further analysed into several different categories. About 25 are 'royal' charters, running in the name of a king; but of these only two or three are likely to be genuine as they stand, leaving a larger number which appear to be adaptations of Latin texts, or charters fabricated in the tenth or eleventh century for one purpose or another. About 45 are 'private' (non-royal) charters, including records of grants, purchases, exchanges, or more complex agreements; and to these should be added about 35 charters which record leases of land by religious houses to those who formed part of the wider society around them. There are otherwise about 50 wills, showing how men and women disposed of their land and other forms of property; about 20 records generated by the processes of litigation conducted for the most part at royal assemblies and shire courts; and about 30 texts of more varied and miscellaneous import.

Harmer's *Select English Historical Documents* and Robertson's *Anglo-Saxon Charters* contain a wide variety of texts, belonging to each of these several different categories; Whitelock's volume, on the other hand, is more closely focused, and provides the bulk (although not the totality) of surviving wills. The vernacular writs, edited separately by Harmer in 1952, are distinct in kind from the texts edited in the first three volumes. One has to bear in mind, however, that writs originated probably in the ninth century, and might well have been as widely used in the tenth century as they came to be in the eleventh.

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[More information](#)*F. E. Harmer's Select English Historical Documents*

Harmer's *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (1914) contains a preface in which Professor Chadwick explains the context in which this the first of these volumes appeared; and it is here that we learn of his larger scheme. There follows an assortment of charters, ranging in date from the early ninth to the second half of the tenth century. Most of the ninth-century documents are from the archives of Christ Church, Canterbury; the tenth-century documents are drawn from a wider variety of archives (see Concordance below). Several were chosen because they are extant in their original form, written on single sheets of parchment in hands judged to be contemporary with the given or apparent date. The single sheets sometimes display physical features, such as changes of hand, additions, and alterations, which contribute to our understanding of the circumstances in which the documents were drawn up and used; they also provide important evidence for the development of the English language. In some cases, such features throw light on the status of the document itself as a record of an agreement or transaction, or as part of a process of litigation.

Harmer's book contains documents of several different kinds, and thus illustrates quite effectively the variety of purposes for which the vernacular was used from the early ninth century onwards. One remarkable text is the charter by which Berhtwulf, king of the Mercians, granted land in Buckinghamshire to his thegn Forthred (no. 3), in the mid-840s, remarkable precisely because it is written in the vernacular, departing in this respect from the use of Latin which was the norm for royal diplomas. Two other examples of Mercian 'royal' charters are interesting not only for the irregularity of their diplomatic form, but also because they were drawn up under an Alfredian dispensation (nos. 12–13). The document which records some transactions underlying King Edward the Elder's foundation of the New Minster, Winchester, in 901 (no. 16), is also anomalous in form, but appears to have genuine documentation of the early tenth century behind it. Among the documents which might be classified as 'private' (non-royal) charters, cast in the vernacular as was the usual practice, we find several records of agreement between two or more parties concerning particular estates and renders (nos. 1, 4–8), and an early example of an episcopal lease (no. 17). There are also five examples of the documents categorized as wills. The will of the reeve Abba (no. 2), made in the 830s, and the will

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of Ealdorman Alfred (no. 10), made towards the end of the ninth century, survive in their original single-sheet form; in each case, changes of hand reflect successive stages in the genesis of the document. Three others – the will of King Alfred (no. 11), the will of Ealdorman Æthelwold (no. 20), and the will of King Eadred (no. 21) – are preserved only in cartulary copies, yet lack for nothing in historical interest.

The royal and private charters are joined here by some of the varied products of litigation. A document which has come to be known as the ‘Fonthill Letter’ (no. 18) is a written statement submitted by a layman (Ealdorman Ordlaf) to the king (Edward the Elder) as evidence for use in a dispute over land at Fonthill, in Wiltshire; the document survives in its original single sheet form, with the main text written conceivably by Ordlaf himself, and (crucially) with a note of the *outcome* of the dispute added on the dorse by a different hand. Two documents provide extended accounts of disputes concerning estates belonging to the church of Worcester, throwing light on the business conducted at Mercian assemblies; both were produced seemingly under the auspices of Bishop Werferth himself (nos. 14–15). Also in this category is the document, full of incidental interest, in which Queen Eadgifu (third wife of King Edward the Elder, mother of King Edmund and King Eadred, and grandmother of King Eadwig and King Edgar) set down the history of an estate which she had given to the church of Canterbury (no. 23).

Three of the texts in Harmer’s collection stand apart from the rest because they are not ‘charters’, in the sense that they do not pertain in one way or another to rights over land. All three are inscriptions entered in early Insular gospel-books of the highest grade, illustrating the continued use of such books for such purposes in the later ninth and tenth centuries. One (no. 9) is a record of the gift to Christ Church, Canterbury, of a mid-eighth-century Southumbrian gospel-book known as the *Codex Aureus*, which had been purchased by Ealdorman Alfred and his wife Werburh ‘from a heathen army, with our pure money, that is, with pure gold’. The second (no. 19) is a record of King Æthelstan’s manumission of a slave called Eadhelm, made ‘very soon after he first became king’, and entered in an early eighth-century Northumbrian gospel-book. The third (no. 22) is the inscription entered in the late tenth century at the back of the Lindisfarne Gospels, recording the tradition that the text had been written by Eadfrith, bishop of Lindisfarne (?698–c. 720), that the book had been bound by Æthelwald, bishop of Lindisfarne (c. 720–40); that the binding

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had been ornamented by Billfrith, the anchorite; and that the English gloss had been added [many years later] by Aldred the priest.

Vernacular documents are generally undated, and their assignment to a particular year, or (more often) to a period expressed by its earliest and latest limits, arises from a combination of internal and external evidence. The matter is likely to depend on the identification of persons mentioned in a document as living or dead, or perhaps on a reference to an event which can itself be dated, or to a stage in the history of an estate. A guide to scholarly discussion of each document is provided in the revised and updated version of Peter Sawyer's *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography*, available online in the form of the 'Electronic Sawyer' (see below).

SIMON KEYNES

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CONCORDANCE

In the table below, each document in Harmer's *Select English Historical Documents* is assigned its number in Peter Sawyer's *Anglo-Saxon Charters: a Revised List and Bibliography* (1968), available online in a revised and updated form at www.esawyer.org.uk (the 'Electronic Sawyer'). The number of a charter in the relevant volume of the new edition of the corpus, published under the auspices of the British Academy, is also given where possible.

Abbreviations

<i>CantCC</i>	<i>Charters of Christ Church, Canterbury</i> , ed. Nicholas Brooks and S. E. Kelly, 3 vols., AS Charters (forthcoming)
<i>CantStA</i>	<i>Charters of St Augustine's Abbey Canterbury</i> , ed. S. E. Kelly, AS Charters 4 (Oxford, 1995)
<i>WinchNM</i>	<i>Charters of the New Minster, Winchester</i> , ed. Sean Miller, AS Charters 9 (Oxford, 2001)
<i>WinchOM</i>	<i>Charters of the Old Minster, Winchester</i> , ed. A. R. Rumble (forthcoming)

Harmer	Sawyer	Archive	Summary of content
1	1188	<i>CantCC</i> 42	grant by Oswulf of land in Kent
2	1482	<i>CantCC</i> 70	will of the reeve Abba
3	204	<i>CantCC</i> 75	charter of King Berhtwulf for Forthred
4	1197	<i>CantCC</i> 84	grant by Lufu to Christ Church
5	1195	<i>CantCC</i> 79	grant by Ealhburg and Eadweald to Christ Church
6	1198	<i>CantStA</i> 24	grant by Ealhburg to St Augustine's
7	1200	<i>CantCC</i> 90	agreement between Eadweald and Cynethryth
8	1202	<i>CantCC</i> 95	agreement between Eald. Alfred and the Abp of Cant.
9	1204a	<i>CantCC</i> 97	donation inscription in a gospel-book (Codex Aureus)
10	1508	<i>CantCC</i> 96	will of Ealdorman Alfred
11	1507	<i>WinchNM</i> 1	will of King Alfred
12	218	Worcester	grant by Ealdorman Æthelred to Berkeley Abbey
13	223	Worcester	grant by Eald. Æthelred & Æthelflæd to Worcester
14	1441	Worcester	agreement between Bishop Wærferth and Æthelwold
15	1446	Worcester	settlement of dispute over land in Gloucestershire
16	1443	<i>WinchNM</i> 2	record of foundation of the New Minster, Winchester
17	1285	<i>WinchOM</i>	lease of land by Bishop Denewulf
18	1445	<i>CantCC</i> 104	the 'Fonthill Letter'
19	--		manumission by King Æthelstan, in a gospel-book
20	1504	<i>WinchOM</i>	will of Ealdorman Æthelwold
21	1515	<i>WinchNM</i> 17	will of King Eadred
22	--	St Cuthbert	entry in a gospel-book (Lindisfarne Gospels)
23	1211	<i>CantCC</i> 124	statement by (Queen) Eadgifu about land in Kent

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SOMETIME SCHOLAR OF GIRTON COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

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PREFACE

MORE than ten years ago Maitland called attention to the need of a satisfactory edition of Anglo-Saxon charters, "those numerous 'land-books' which must be re-edited if the first period of English history is ever to be well understood." Unfortunately, however, his appeal has not as yet met with any response.

Until facilities for a work of this magnitude are forthcoming something may be done by editions of selected texts. Hitherto very few of these documents have been published in a conveniently accessible form and with explanatory notes sufficient to make their contents intelligible; and it is no doubt largely due to this fact that their manifold interest is so little known. At the same time it has been shewn by *The Crawford Charters* (ed. Napier and Stevenson, Oxford, 1895) that a scholarly edition of even a small number of such texts is capable of rendering valuable assistance to the general study of the subject.

The twenty-three documents contained in this volume—most of which may be described as charters—cover a period of rather more than a century and a half, beginning from the early years of the ninth century. They are among the earliest English texts of their kind; for, owing to the fact that the written covenant was of foreign (ecclesiastical) origin, the earliest charters—unlike the laws—appear to have been regularly composed in Latin. Indeed we have very few, if any, genuine English charters of the seventh or eighth centuries—certainly none preserved in contemporary MSS.—and even in later times Latin charters are far more numerous. This remark however applies properly only to grants of land or privileges. Wills are usually in English, though we have no genuine specimens earlier than the ninth century.

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Classified according to their character seven of these documents (I, III–VI, XVI, XXIII) are grants of estates or privileges (rents, etc.) made by kings or landowners. One (XVII) is a lease, another (VIII) a deed of exchange. Six (VII, XII–XV, XVIII) may perhaps best be described as records of negotiations, the last being in the form of a letter. Five (II, X, XI, XX, XXI) are wills, including those of two kings, Alfred and Eadred. One (XIX) is a deed of manumission. The two remaining (IX, XXII) are dedicatory inscriptions in MSS. of the Gospels, relating to their origin or history.

Apart from their historical importance these documents possess also considerable linguistic interest. Seven of them (I, II, IV, V, VII, IX, X) are written in the Kentish dialect, of which they are probably the earliest specimens; one (III) is in Mercian and one (XXII) in Northumbrian. The language of the rest is West Saxon, a dialect which seems eventually to have come into literary use in many parts of England. In certain cases however the texts which have come down to us are clearly derived from older ones with different linguistic characteristics. Thus VI and VIII shew evident traces of Kentish dialect, while Mercian features may be detected in XII–XV.

There can be little doubt that, with one possible exception (XVI), all these documents are genuine records. In twelve cases (I–V, VII, IX, X, XVIII, XIX, XXII, XXIII) either the original MSS. or contemporary copies have been preserved; the rest are known only from later, but fairly good, copies. It may be added that the Editor has spared no pains to obtain as accurate a text as possible. Except in two cases (IX and XXI) the MSS. have everywhere been submitted to careful and repeated examination, which has led to the correction of a number of erroneous readings found in previous editions.

H. MUNRO CHADWICK.

October, 1914.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

THE abbreviations found in the MSS have for the most part been reproduced in these texts. The symbol þ is, however, expanded to *þæt* (except in x), and ð- is written *-um*. The sign 7 has been retained wherever it occurs in the MSS. The punctuation has been modernised and capital letters have been introduced in accordance with modern usage. Letters which have been omitted in the MS, or which are no longer legible, are enclosed in []; letters written above or below the line are enclosed in ` `. In passages where the text has been emended, the letters which have been supplied by the editor are printed in italics.

The editor desires to express her thanks to the staff of the University Library, Cambridge, to the staff of the British Museum, to the Librarian of Lambeth Palace, and to Mr C. W. Moule, late Librarian of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, for the kindness and courtesy shewn to her during the progress of her work. She would like to take this opportunity of thanking the Council of Girton College for the Research Studentship which made this work possible. Her thanks are also due to the staff of Girton College for their kindly interest, and especially to Miss B. S. Phillpotts, Fellow of Somerville College, formerly Librarian of Girton College, for valuable suggestions and advice. She is also indebted to Mr M. D. Forbes, Fellow of Clare College, for collating the texts (III and XVIII) preserved

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in the Library of Canterbury Cathedral; and to her father, Mr H. A. Harmer, for help in preparing the manuscript for press.

Above all, she wishes to express her indebtedness to Prof. Chadwick, to whose suggestion this work owes its inception and without whose help and guidance it could never have been completed. She has especially to thank Prof. Chadwick for help with translations, for much information embodied in the notes, and for extensive criticism and suggestions; also for reading the manuscript and the proofs, and for supplying the Preface.

Her thanks are also due to the Syndics of the University Press for undertaking the publication of this book and to their staff for their great care and skill.

F. E. H.

September, 1914.

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ABBREVIATIONS

O.E.T.=Sweet, *Oldest English Texts*.D.B.=*Domesday Book*, ed. Sir H. Ellis. Published by the Record Commission, London, 1816.Kemble=*Codex Diplomaticus Ævi Saxonici*, ed. J. M. Kemble, London, 1839—1848.Birch=*Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. Walter de Gray Birch, 1885—93.Earle=*Handbook to the Landcharters*, ed. Earle, 1888.Thorpe=*Diplomatarium Anglicum Ævi Saxonici*, ed. B. Thorpe, London, 1865.Crawf. Ch.=*Crawford Charters*, ed. Napier & Stevenson: *Anecdota Oxoniensia, Medieval & Modern Series*, Pt 7, 1895.Dugdale=*Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. Sir William Dugdale. The references are to the revised edition published in 1846 by J. Caley, H. Ellis & B. Bandinel.Wanley=H. Wanlei *Librorum Vett. Septentrionalium Catalogus Historico-Criticus*, 1705 (Hickes, *Linguarum Vett. Sept. Thesaurus*, vol. II.).Liebermann=F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, Halle, 1898—1912.Brit. Mus. Facs.=*Facsimiles of Ancient Charters in the British Museum*, ed. E. A. Bond, 1873—1878.Ordn. Sur. Facs.=*Ordnance Survey, Facsimiles of Anglo-Saxon MSS.*, ed. W. B. Sanders, 1878—84.Ducange=*Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis*, ed. Ducange.