

Chapter I

INTRODUCTORY

THE MATERIAL

(1) *Primary sources*

The original documents upon which this study is based consist of the court- and account-rolls of certain manors of Crowland Abbey, for the period 1258–1528.¹ The total number of these rolls is ninety-six, and nearly all of them are in excellent condition.

It is perhaps superfluous to point out that the types of evidence given by court- and account-rolls vary considerably. In one respect only, the receipts from fines and fees, are they definitely complementary; these profits, as recorded in the court-rolls, being an important and regular item of the annual account. There are points of contact, as, for instance, when the account-rolls record disbursements and receipts for purposes explained and discussed in the court-rolls, or where the account rendered of money-rent and labour-services for the year corroborates statements made in court concerning the conditions of land-tenure there enrolled. But for the most part a fundamental divergence of sphere is shown, for the account-roll deals with the manor in the static, the court-roll in the dynamic, aspect. In one are recorded only matters which are convertible into an unimpassioned statement of expenditure or receipt; in the other we see the inhabitants of the manor in action, and reconstruct their attitude towards fines and taxes, their connexion with the King's officials and with the public courts, their relations with their neighbours, and sometimes their very personalities. The court was also an

¹ Preserved at Queens' College, Cambridge. All references to Ad., Cd., Dd., Ed., Fd., Q., X., are to these rolls.

administrative bureau, and from its injunctions and regulations is gained much information concerning the organisation of communal life.

This general difference between court- and account-roll evidence relegates the accounts, on the whole, to a position of secondary importance. Occasionally, however, they may prove most valuable; the effects of the Barons' War in 1267, the episode of the King's visit in 1314, and the reconstruction of the Cottenham murder of 1322, are derived solely from account-roll evidence and afford good illustrations of its possibilities. These particular account-rolls vary, however, in importance, owing to differences of form. Three types of roll appear during this period:

A. The reeve's single account, dealing with the whole of manorial profit and loss, which may be roughly subdivided into

- (a) Its "political" element, e.g. the receipts of rent, tallage and judicial fines; and the disbursement of the manor's share in national taxation.
- (b) Its agrarian element, e.g. the profit from labour-services and their sale, and from the disposal of grain and stock; and the expense of wages, implements and repairs.

After about 1322, these inherent divisions are recognised in the form of rendering the account and we find two other types of roll in place of the above:

B. The rent-collector's or bailiff's account for items of type (a).

C. The reeve's complementary account for items of type (b).

There is a parallel series of these interdependent accounts for the years 1361-1410, and from a comparison it is evident that the respective spheres of the two officials were not well defined,

INTRODUCTORY 3

and much financial confusion must have resulted from this double method of accountancy.

So vast a range of documents, rivalled only by the Ramsey collection, is naturally not complete, either geographically or chronologically. For some manors very scanty evidence exists,¹ and the main material for this study is drawn from three Cambridgeshire estates which alone possess a complementary series of court- and account-rolls. Where possible, the precise extent of the material from which a statement is made has been indicated, but the following table will be of assistance in avoiding confusion between the general and the particular:

ACCOUNT-ROLLS COURT-ROLLS

Chrono-logical scope	Geographical scope	Type	Chronological scope	Geographical scope
1258-1322 with gaps	All the manors (Lincs, Cambs, Hunts, Northants)	A	1290-1528 (from 1290 to 1420 without a single gap. After this the only gaps of noteworthy length are	Joint court for the three Cambridgeshire manors. No court-rolls survive for the period before the Dissolution for those in other counties
1341-1410	Manor of Oakington (Cambs) only	B		
1361-1411	”	C		
1413-1427 with gaps	”	A		
1455-1529 with gaps	Joint account for the Cambridgeshire manors — Oakington, Cottenham and Dry Drayton	B	1445-1451, 1480-1494, 1502-1512, 1515-1522)	

It may be noted, therefore, that *any* evidence drawn from the manorial documents after 1322 applies only to Cambridgeshire, and that of the three manors in that county there is only one, Oakington, which possesses continuous records in both classes of documents.

Apart from the court- and account-rolls, little manorial material is available. There are no extents. Two Cambridgeshire rentals exist for the year 1344 and there is in the Cambridge

¹ The estates possessing records are denoted in the table, p. 10.

University Library a fifteenth-century copy of a Crowland rental of 1272 which refers to several of the Lincolnshire manors.¹

(2) *External sources*

There are three main external sources: Domesday Book (1086), the Hundred Rolls (1274–5, 1279–80),² and the Placita de Quo Warranto (Edward I, II and III).³ These are important sources of evidence for the number and names of the Crowland estates in the 172 years before the manorial rolls begin. They also provide data concerning the area of some estates, the Hundred Rolls of 1279–80 giving especially detailed surveys of two Cambridge-shire manors.

By the testimony of Domesday Book, Crowland was in possession of most of her lands before the Norman Conquest. An adequate investigation of the earlier history of these lands is, however, impossible, owing to the absence of authentic material relating to the Abbey in the Anglo-Saxon period. The question of origins must remain obscure and controversial, for the original charters of the benefactors were destroyed by fire in 1091, and the earliest genuine charter surviving is Henry II's confirmation of the monastery's possessions.⁴ The documents given in Ingulf's *Historia Croylandensis*,⁵ supposedly written by the Abbot of that name (c. 1095), cannot be regarded as valid evidence; for this history has been exposed⁶ as a forgery composed any time between 1182 and 1450. Its charters may indeed be

¹ Add. MS. 4400.

² Printed 1818 (Record Commission). References to Crowland property occur in the Rolls of 1274–5 for Lincs, Hunts, Leics, Northants, but not in those for Cambs; and in the Rolls of 1279–80 for Hunts and Cambs. There is also a reference in the unprinted roll (?1277–8) for Hunts in the Bodleian Library (Bodleian MS. Huntingdon Rolls, 1).

³ References to Crowland property occur in the eyre-rolls of Lincs (1281), Hunts (1286), Cambs (1299), Northants (1329).

⁴ Wrest Park Cartulary (W.P.C.), fols. 23 d., 24.

⁵ *Rerum Anglicarum Scriptores Veteres*, I.

⁶ See W. G. Searle, *Ingulf and the Historia Croylandensis*, Camb. Antiq. Soc. xxvii.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-50197-3 - The Estates of Crowland Abbey: A Study in Manorial Organisation
Frances M. Page
Excerpt
[More information](#)

PLATE II



GUTHLAC BUILDS HIS CHAPEL
[Harley MS. Y. 6]

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-50197-3 - The Estates of Crowland Abbey: A Study in Manorial Organisation

Frances M. Page

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTORY

5

paraphrases of those which once existed, and record genuine historical fact, but they cannot be used with any confidence for fixing the dates of the Abbey's acquisitions and the names of benefactors. The Wrest Park Cartulary,¹ compiled about 1366, must also be used with some reservation, for it does not necessarily escape the influence of "Ingulf". Most of the early medieval histories and chronicles² give scanty mention of Crowland itself, and no indication of the origin of its lands. The chronicle of the monk Felix³ (c. 757) deals only with the life of Guthlac, the patron saint. Ordericus Vitalis, writing about 1141, uses this chronicle in that portion of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*⁴ which refers to Crowland, and adds a valuable section on the later history of the monastery, gathered from the tradition current among the monks, whom he visited shortly after the death (c. 1109) of Abbot Ingulf. He provides, however, little information concerning the origin of the manors. The best source of evidence for this point is unusual. Part of the Harley MS. (1150) is known as the St Guthlac scroll,⁵ and consists of a series of drawings illustrating the life of the hermit. The final drawing⁶ shows thirteen benefactors of Crowland, headed by King Ethelbald, the founder of the Abbey, advancing in a struggling crowd to make their presentations at the altar of the patron saint. Each carries a scroll, upon which is written the name of the donor and his gift. This is a source of evidence of indisputable authenticity. It should be noted that its evidence nearly always corroborates that of "Ingulf" and of the Wrest Park Cartulary.

¹ Preserved in the Museum of the Gentlemen's Society, Spalding.

² The chief sources of this kind for the period of early Crowland history are: (a) *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, (b) Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, (c) Asser's *Life of Alfred*, (d) The Chronicles of Æthelweard, Matthew Paris, Florence of Worcester, (e) William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, (f) Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*.

³ Printed by W. de G. Birch, *Memorials of St Guthlac*.

⁴ Ed. A. le Prévost, book II, 268–290.

⁵ Brit. Mus. Harley MS. Y 6.

⁶ Frontispiece.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-50197-3 - The Estates of Crowland Abbey: A Study in Manorial Organisation

Frances M. Page

Excerpt

[More information](#)

The dates of the bequests are unknown. Reference to unsound sources, and especially to “Ingulf’s” successive charters of confirmation by the Anglo-Saxon Kings, is the only means of computing, even roughly, the dates of the acquisitions. It is obvious that, though much of the *Historia Croylandensis* may represent true historical fact, the dating must be particularly open to question, since the object of the writer may very well have been to antedate the monastery’s possessions in order to point to priority of tenure in quarrels with rivals.¹ And, in conclusion, it must be pointed out that this deficiency in the evidence makes impossible any profitable comment upon the early donors. In the Harley MS., for example, four benefactors named “Algarus” (Ælfgar) occur. “Algarus filius Norlang” gave estates in Baston and Thetford; “Algarus comes” (whose parentage is not stated) gave land in Spalding, Pinchbeck, Whaplode and Holbeach; “Algarus diaconus” presented the manor in Dowdike. According to the Wrest Park Cartulary, the lands in Baston and Thetford were given in 825 by “Algarus filius Vorthangia”,² but the charter can hardly have been transcribed from a genuine source, since the originals were destroyed before the compilation of the Cartulary; and the date is not therefore beyond dispute. “Ingulf” places this Algar’s benefaction (with the addition of Rippingale) among the possessions confirmed by Kenulph in 806.³ The donation of Earl

¹ The struggle to maintain the interests of Crowland in Spalding against the monks of Angers and their patron, Ivo of Tailbois, is a case in point. This was occurring about 1195. Ivo’s gift to Angers in Spalding took place c. 1085; “Ingulf” produces a charter to show that in addition to the early grant of Earl Algar, the sheriff Thorold founded a cell for Crowland in Spalding in 1051 (*Hist. Croyl.* p. 86).

² Fol. 167 d. (2). The charter appears also in W. de G. Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, I, 52, and in Dugdale, *Monasticon*, II, 109. Both compilations draw their evidence from the documents of J. Oldfrid, Esq. (Spalding), and the charter quoted corresponds with that of the Wrest Park Cartulary.

³ *Hist. Croyl.* p. 6; W. de G. Birch, *Cart. Sax.* I, 453; Dugdale, *op. cit.* II, 108–9.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-50197-3 - The Estates of Crowland Abbey: A Study in Manorial Organisation
Frances M. Page
Excerpt
[More information](#)

PLATE III



ST BARTHOLOMEW GIVES GUTHLAC A SCOURGE TO CHASTISE
THE DEMONS WHICH TORMENT HIM
[Harley MS. Y. 6]