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(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

Volume XC
for 2001



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**Volume XC
for 2001**

Editor Alison Taylor

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Editorial

Last year's Proceedings followed the theme of landscape history and this one is even more tightly focused, concentrating on religion in Cambridgeshire in the last 2000 years. This is in celebration of the Millennium (which we all know is really this year). It also gives us a chance to show the breadth of the Society's approaches to the past, for papers include orthodox archaeological excavation (of a Romano-Celtic temple), a more unusual exploration of objects from the dust beneath King's College Chapel, and a survey of the architecture and history of all the bell-frames in the (old) County. We are also able to set out the 1291 Valuation of the Diocese of Ely, which will be of great benefit to medieval historians, to take a look at evidence for the fascinating topic of Anglo-Saxon minsters and to examine the truth behind the legends of St Guthlac of Crowland. For something quite different we have a final paper on a 20th century mosque in Cambridge, as multi-faith culture returns to Britain.

Alison Taylor

President's Address

The sudden death of Tim Potter early last year, and the sad loss of his scholarly interest in the Roman Fens, was acknowledged by CAS in two ways: through the lecture by his colleague and fellow excavator of Stonea, Ralph Jackson, and through selection of Roman Cambridgeshire as the topic for the March conference. The publication of the British Museum's epic volume on their investigations at Stonea and of this Society's volume on Roman Cambridge provided a new level of knowledge against which many recent excavations can be compared. The conference on Roman Cambridgeshire revealed how some had made sense of this new data, fitting it into the context known from previous research and testing established models with fresh evidence. A number of common themes seemed to run through the papers that were delivered at this conference, most notably the importance of East Anglia as the bread basket for the Roman Empire, exporting grain to its garrisons on the Rhine and Hadrian's Wall, the need to store and defend this grain contributing to the development of town defences in the 4th century as the burden of taxation for the local population became increasingly oppressive.

Cambridge Antiquarian Society needs to stimulate such synthesis and debate because the present system of excavation and reporting controlled by the needs of modern economic development has become formulaic, a mechanistic response driven by a planning process with little regard to furthering archaeological research or rewarding academic endeavour. It is essential that CAS encourages active involvement in archaeology by its membership (both amateur and professional), and combines this with knowledge and experience of members who come from other disciplines. The Society needs to act as an intermediary to encourage exchange of information so that clarity can be established, particularly with regard to major research questions. Cambridge Antiquarian Society has been a lead organisation in the study and preservation of Cambridgeshire's heritage for the past 160 years; the Society began the collections that led to creation of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and it was CAS who provided money for the first lectureship in Archaeology to be established at the University. Through its two annual conferences, its Proceedings and Conduit it is still the body that presents the results of excavations and other research to both the academic and public world, with dissemination of this information stretching to universities throughout the globe through its system of exchanging periodicals. Compared to such a record the recent vacillations in local government provision and legislative framework for protection of our heritage reveals how important it is to have continuity and democratic scrutiny. The Society is proud of its tradition of knowledgeable independence and must not be beguiled into believing it has no right to represent views at the highest levels when the need arises.

Tim Malim

Anglo-Saxon minsters in south Cambridgeshire

Susan Oosthuizen

The evidence explored in this paper suggests that the vitality of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon Cambridgeshire was affected at least as much by wider historical processes as by the Danish invasion, and did not differ markedly in character from the rest of Anglo-Saxon England during the period c. 650–1060.

I

This paper salvages a small conclusion from the wreckage of a grander idea. In other parts of England middle Anglo-Saxon minsters have been identified, their parishes and estates reconstructed, the developing relationships between minsters and their daughter churches explored, and the chronology of this process teased out in some detail (Bassett 1992, 13–40; Blair 1994, 69–77; Gelling 1992, 97–100). The replication of this work in Cambridgeshire south of the River Ouse might have thrown a rather more direct light on such questions as the universality of minster organisation across the kingdoms of middle Anglo-Saxon England and the impact of the Danish settlement on Christian worship on the fringes of the Danelaw. Although a paucity of evidence has curtailed this larger ambition for south Cambridgeshire, enough has emerged to enable some tentative conclusions to be drawn about these questions.

What little is known of the detailed history of the provision and administration of Christianity in the region around Cambridge before the Norman Conquest is based on archaeological and some sparse documentary evidence. Lead fonts, a priest's equipment from Sutton (Ely), and the Water Newton treasure are good samples of the archaeological evidence for Christian worship in this area, but whether Christianity was restricted to an elite or was widespread among the general population is not known. There is no indication if it survived into the sub-Roman period, since all the finds appear to have been deliberately buried or discarded.

The earliest post-Roman evidence relates to the activities of the 7th century kings of East Anglia and Mercia who founded monastic houses on or near their common Cambridgeshire border, of which the best known are Ely and Peterborough. St Felix is said to have founded his diocese based on a minster at Soham

in 630 under the patronage of King Sigeberht of East Anglia, a date which coincides with the establishment of a possible religious site at Brandon (Suffolk) and another at Hadstock (Essex) (Map 1) (Blake 1962, liv and 17; VCH 2, 141; Warner 1996, 123–126; Carr 1988; Rodwell 1974). Female members of the royal family became the focus of local religious cults after their deaths : Æthelthryth (Ely) is the best known, together with her sisters, Sexburga, Withburga (East Dereham) and Erminalda, and her nieces, Ædnoth and Wendreda (March and Exning) (Warner 1996, 143). The Mercian royal family was equally active at Peterborough, Crowland, Thorney and Castor. There is documentary evidence for a minster at Horningsea before 870.

The inclusion of Cambridgeshire in the Danelaw between 807 and 917 is said to have led to the destruction of Soham and Horningsea. Hadstock, too, is said to have been sacked, and it is commonly thought that Christianity in Cambridgeshire was virtually lost during this period (though see Woudhuysen 1997). A resurgence of Christianity is accepted in the post-Danish period, when the existence of minsters at Swavesey, Meldreth and Little Shelford is accepted (VCH 9, 392; Rumble 1981, 5:26 and 5:30). There is a post-medieval reference to an 11th century nunnery at Eltisley. This paper aims to explore these conclusions in more detail.

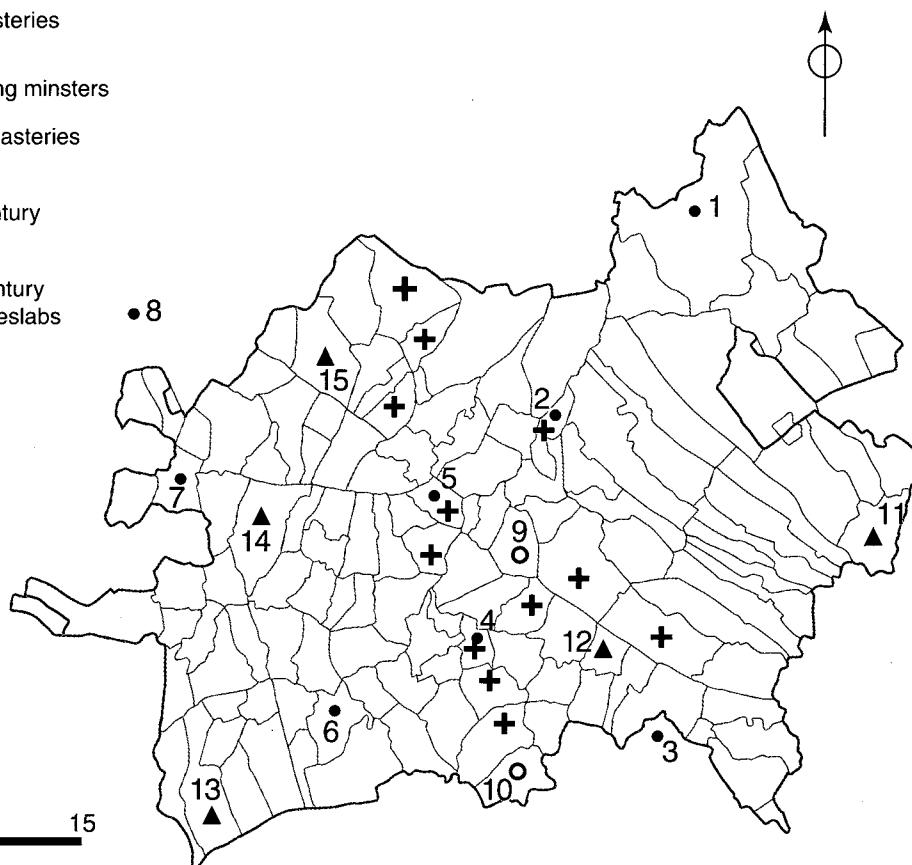
II

Work by researchers over the past decade has led to a substantial growth in knowledge about the organisation and administration of Christianity in England during the Anglo-Saxon period (eg Blair 1988a, 1992, Bassett 1992, Croom 1988, Hadley 1996, Morris 1989). There has been some controversy about this work (Blair 1995, Cambridge and Rollason 1995), but in general it is accepted that from the conversion to Christianity in the early 7th century until parish churches became commonplace towards the end of the 10th century, most Christians received their religion at the hands of small communities of secular priests who served *parochiae* between 5 and 15 times the size of modern parishes (Blair 1998, 1). These establishments — neither monasteries nor churches but something of

Key

- Pre-Viking monasteries and minsters
- Possible pre-Viking minsters
- ▲ 10th century monasteries and minsters
- △ Possible 10th century minsters
- + 10th and 11th century crosses and graveslabs
- 1. Soham
2. Horningsea
3. Hadstock
4. Little Shelford
5. Cambridge
6. Meldreth
7. Eltisley
8. Godmanchester
9. Cherry Hinton
10. Ickleton
- ▲ 11. Kirtling
12. Little Abington
13. Steeple Morden
14. Bourn
15. Swavesey

0 15



Map 1. Early and late Anglo-Saxon minsters in South Cambridgeshire 630–1066

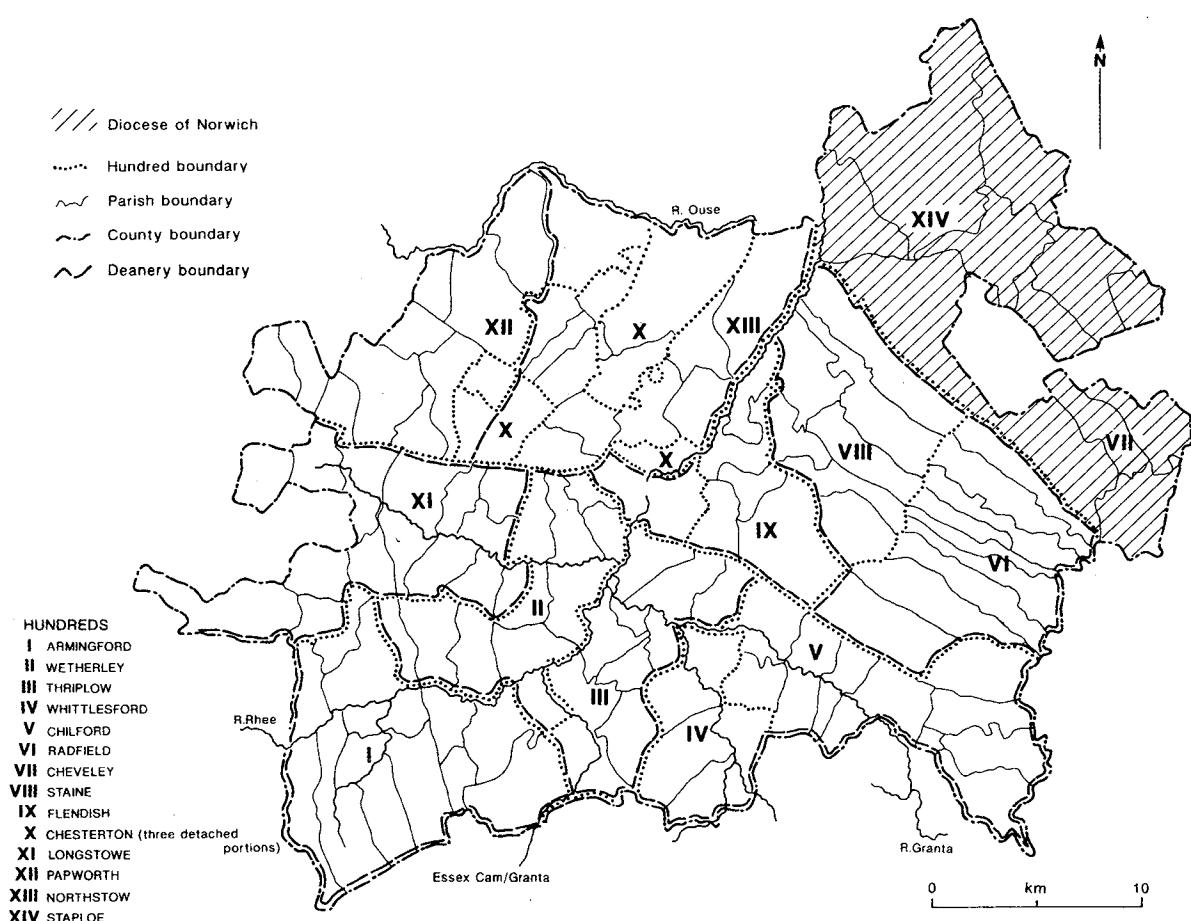
both, and termed 'minsters' or *monasteria* in the literature — may have been far more common than the great monastic houses of the period where monks and nuns lived in religious seclusion (Blair 1998, 124). Their brief was not the service of God through contemplation and retreat, but active worship through ministering to communities of Christians in the world itself. Their priests travelled to outlying communities in each *parochia*, where graveyards, preaching crosses and subsidiary cult centres acted as a focal point for local worship. Small subsidiary chapels may have been constructed if the minster lay at a great distance, although priests continued to be based at the minster. The rights of the minster church to tithes and other rights and dues from its flock remained unchallenged, whatever the nature of local provision for worship (Blair 1988b, 55).

Many of these minsters were founded during the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries in outlying areas of royal estates (*villae regales*) or tribal regions (*regiones*), and the *parochiae* which they served were often based on these large administrative units (Croom 1988, 67). Minsters were usually endowed with considerable estates, which formed part, but not all, of the *parochia*. In the middle Saxon period these large estates, both secular and religious, have been characterised as 'multiple'

estates (cf Jones 1979).

There are some indications that by the 9th century the energy sustaining both minsters and monasteries had become dissipated in some places, and that clerical life may have entered the doldrums. Bede's dismissive letter of 734 describing wanton living, vanity, over-indulgence and gluttony in 'many and large places of this kind, which ... are useful neither to God nor to man' is well-known (Whitelock 1979, 804).

The inclusion of Cambridgeshire in the Danelaw between about 870 and 917 obscures evidence for the continued administration of this system in eastern England. The degree of disruption to Christian worship was variable. In many cases the vitality of some houses may already have been dulled well before the invasions, to which the latter simply applied the *coup de grace*. Some minsters were sacked, and some were lost altogether (Whitelock 1979, 192 n.6). At yet others ecclesiastical life continued, but never regained the vigour and wealth of its earlier years. This process of decline may have resulted as much from other processes as from the effects of the Danish conquest (Hadley 1996, 17, and see below). Many minsters experienced the alienation of small and large parts of their estates. In many cases this was the result of re-appropriation of family lands by their founding



Map 2. Dioceses, deaneries, parishes and hundreds in south Cambridgeshire.

families, local landowners who could not accept the alienation of estates in perpetuity to a minster; in other cases, the minster's 'warland' might be sub-infeudated to freemen or sokemen, who might transfer their allegiance to other lords in turn (Faith 1997).

The break-up of these older minster parishes continued in the early 10th century. The establishment of new minsters by kings, leading thegns or the church to serve only their estates (estate minsters) rather than a wider *parochia* and, more commonly, the building of local churches in each vill diminished the influence of the older minster churches. Parishioners, instead of continuing to tithe to the old minster, paid their tithes to the new estate minster or manorial church. This loss of their tithes and the alienation of parts of *parochiae* as a result of new parishes being carved out of the *parochia*, led to the diminution of the old minsters' ecclesiastical and administrative influence. The culmination of this process was the reduction of the status of old minsters to no more than local, parish churches.

III

Sources for exploring the history of Christian activity in Cambridgeshire during the period between 600 and 1050 are disappointingly sparse. Croom and Blair

have suggested a number of criteria for recognising minsters (Croom 1988, 68–71; Blair 1988a, 2), and it was initially hoped that these might form the basis of this study. These criteria are however difficult to apply in Cambridgeshire since there is relatively little early charter evidence. Cambridgeshire charters and wills survive almost only from the 10th century onwards (cf Hart 1966; Whitelock 1930). A few 10th century documents mention churches, but they do not assist this study since the relatively late date of the documents and the lack of any other evidence for minster status means that they most probably refer to manorial churches.

The Cambridgeshire Domesday mentions only three institutions: two minsters (*monasteria*), at Shelford and Meldreth, and one church (*ecclesia*) at Teversham (Rumble 1981, 5:26; 5:30; 35:2). In twelve cases priests (*presbiter*) are mentioned, but only in the context of their landholdings; very often it is the *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis* (hereafter ICC) rather than Domesday Book which includes the information that these tenants are priests (VCH 1, 400–427).¹

It is possible that 'the churches without independent rights or endowments, and thus without value as property, are the least likely to appear [in Domesday

Book]; and these would have remained commonest where organisation remained most hierarchical' (Blair 1987, 275). If this were true, Christianity in late 11th century Cambridgeshire would be more likely to be focused on minster provision rather than on local parish churches. But it is unlikely that the whole of southern Cambridgeshire was subordinate to minsters at Shelford and Meldreth in 1086; furthermore, many Cambridgeshire parishes are likely to have been served by a local (parish) church by that date. Perhaps the combined effect of the declining influence of minsters and the widespread erection of manorial churches meant that religious worship had become far more local and integrated into manorial estates by 1086 and so church land was not perceived as an independent economic resource by the Domesday commissioners. The distinction between inland (demesne land which was ineligible for tax) and warland (extra-demesne land which was eligible for tax) is not useful here, since neither those churches that were clearly on inland — as the church at Swavesey was — nor churches that had been founded by sokemen, and were therefore presumably on warland — as at Great Eversden and Comberton — are mentioned in Domesday Book (Faith 1997, Ch. 2 and 4; Oosthuizen 1997, 50 and 53).

Occasionally Domesday evidence is more helpful: sometimes more than one priest, or the endowment of a church with at least one hide of land (120 acres), is noted in a vill in 1086. Haslam has suggested that in the period immediately following the Norman Conquest collegiate composition, particularly by Augustinian canons, may indicate refoundings of pre-conquest minster churches and occasionally this evidence exists (Haslam 1984, 15). However, even where it is possible to suggest that a church may once have been a minster there is usually nothing concrete to suggest a foundation date or even century, particularly where pre-Danish origins are looked for.

Relationships between deanery boundaries have been useful in other places in suggesting the extent of once larger minster estates, but this evidence is not always useful in Cambridgeshire (Map 2)². It is almost certain that the county boundary was established soon after the West Saxon reconquest of Cambridgeshire in 917, and it is likely that the hundred boundaries are of roughly the same period. Since deanery and hundred boundaries generally coincide, cutting unconcernedly across older estates and, by inference, the *parochiae* to which they belonged, they are both likely to be part of the ruthless imposition of West Saxon administration (Map 2). For example, Great and Little Gransden were divided between Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire although both estates still belonged to the Abbey of Ely in the late 10th century; Odsey, an out-settlement of Guilden Morden, gave its name to Odsey Hundred in Hertfordshire; the boundary of the *territorium* of the Roman town at Great Chesterford (Essex) ran between Ickleton and Duxford (Bassett 1989, 25); Balsham lies in Radfield Hundred but its mother parish, West Wickham, lies in Chilford Hundred; and

so on. A few exceptions to the deanery boundaries are helpful in elucidating earlier relationships, and are discussed below.

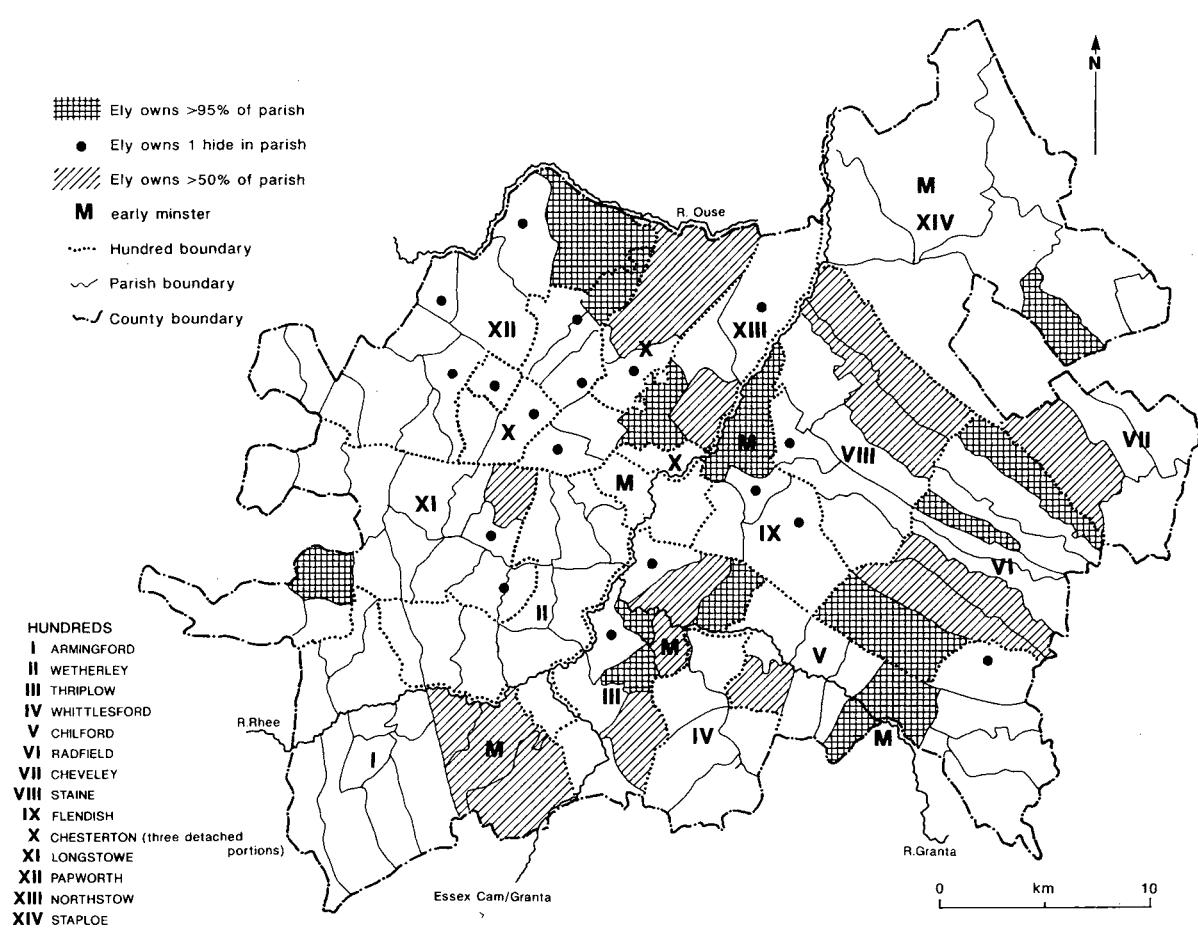
Finally, the possibility of identifying royal centres through 'kings' -*tuns*' and from them their associated minsters also founders. Sawyer lists no kings' -*tuns* in Cambridgeshire (Sawyer 1983, 293–299), and those which can be identified do not generally throw light on the question.³ Sawyer suggests three groups of place name. In south Cambridgeshire the first group — place names which denote a royal connection, like Kingston and Conington — are both clayland parishes, and are not likely to be primary royal manors with possible minsters attached. Glenn Foard has suggested that this particular combination of place name and topography may indicate royal woodland with a specialised function (pers comm); Faith has suggested that this name may denote 'property devoted to the support of the king ... not necessarily [his] residence' (Faith 1997, 32). Whatever their origin, these two names do not help in the identification of minsters. The second group — places which supplied food rents — were centred, in Cambridgeshire, on the royal manor at Exning, which is discussed in the Appendix in the context of the minster at Soham; the third group, place names combining a regional name with the suffix — *tun* — is represented in south Cambridgeshire by just one name: Arrington, which is also discussed in the Appendix (cf Meldreth).

This research has therefore been thrown back on patchy documentary evidence augmented by architectural and archaeological details, church dedications, topography and, sometimes, the relationships between mother and daughter churches.

IV

The methods and criteria used to identify minsters in this paper include :

1. a documentary reference in an Anglo-Saxon charter, will or Domesday Book
2. a church endowed with at least one hide (120 acres) in 1086 (Hart has noted that in Cambridgeshire the average holding of priests at Domesday was 30 acres (Hart 1995a, 60)). 'The period c. 975–1025 saw ... [the establishment of] 'superior' estate churches. This category probably includes many of the one-hide or 20s. churches in Domesday Book' such as that at Bourn (Blair 1988a, 7; Appendix).
3. topographical evidence, particularly siting on islands or promontories. Blair has suggested that 'the summits or shoulders of low hills and promontories, islands in marshy floodplains and headlands in the bends of rivers' are likely sites for early minsters (Blair 1992, 227). Stocker has found similar evidence in Lincolnshire where minsters are often found on sites with 'good communications with a major river valley' (Stocker 1993, 106).
4. the existence of a subcircular or circular graveyard or *llan* around a church (cf Pearce 1985, 259).
5. evidence for collegiate priests at a church in the later 11th century (cf Haslam 1986, 15). 'Many



Map 3. The south Cambridgeshire estates of the Abbey of Ely as recorded in Domesday Book

ex-minsters retained large parishes and abnormal clerical staffs' (Blair 1988a, 2).

6. the receipt of early tithes such as churchscot, ploughalms, hearthpenny, soulscot and *scrifcorn* mentioned in documents from the 7th to the 10th century and/or the payment of these tithes from one church to another (Whitelock 1979, 399, 431, 444).
7. architectural and/or archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon religious activity, including a cruciform plan with a central tower, and unusually long chancels. Blair has commented on 'the frequency with which ex-ministers are perpetuated as grand 12th century churches, either cruciform or in some other way imposing' (Blair 1988b, 14–16) and suggests that a 'building with a large crossing with lateral porticus ... [may] suggest a church of senior status in the later pre-conquest period' (Blair 1985, 121), although this is not necessarily always the case in Cambridgeshire (A P Baggs, pers comm).
8. unusual or early dedications.

In only a few cases is just one of these snippets of evidence sufficient to identify a minster without other supportive evidence; generally, a number of pieces of evidence, none strong enough in itself but together

building a case, need to be adduced. The detailed arguments for each site are presented in the Appendix.

V

The history of Anglo-Saxon minster churches in Cambridgeshire reflects a complex interplay of growth, development and decline. At least six minsters appear to have been established in the 250 years between 630 and 870 — at Soham, Horningsea, Cambridge, Hadstock, Little Shelford and Meldreth — following the pattern observed in other parts of Anglo-Saxon England during the same period. Like those in other areas, some flourished while others did not; some remained vigorous, some became moribund, and others disappeared altogether. By the late 11th century only Cambridge, Little Shelford and Meldreth were still in existence. This paper examines the reasons behind this apparent decline.

Detailed evidence presented in the Appendix suggests that there is no reason to think that, before the Danish invasions of 870, south Cambridgeshire differed significantly from other parts of southern England in terms of its political, social or religious organisation (see for example Blair 1994, 97; Bassett 1992; Oosthuizen 1998). Minster churches were just as

likely to have been built in the area before 870 as elsewhere, as those at Soham and Horningsea, and nearby Ely and Peterborough, show. There is nothing to suggest that the character of these minsters, their *parochiae* or their endowments differed from those in other parts of Anglo-Saxon England. Indeed, the description of Horningsea (quoted below, Appendix) suggests that West Saxon visitors to that establishment before 870 would have found a minster with whose type they were quite familiar.

The vitality of the local church before 870 cannot however be assumed to have been uniformly strong across the region any more than it was across the country as a whole. There is evidence for a general decline in monastic standards as early as the 8th century: for example, Bede cites numerous examples of dissolute and corrupt behaviour, other sources complain of poverty while Asser describes a church undermined by royal encroachments and by religious apathy (Sherley-Price 1990, 345–46; Hadley 1996, 3). The middle Saxon site at Brandon (just over the county boundary in Suffolk) demonstrates that monastic sites might be abandoned before, rather than necessarily as a result of, the Danish invasions (Carr 1988)⁴, while the large number of sokemen in 1086 holding land which may earlier have formed part of the 'minster' endowment suggests that the fragmentation of the 'warland' of early Anglo-Saxon minster estates in Cambridgeshire may also have had a pre-Danish origin (see below).

The *parochiae* served by these minsters covered most of the Cam valley: Soham's seems to have extended over the whole of Staploe Hundred, which falls within the Diocese of Norwich, in contrast to the rest of Cambridgeshire; Horningsea may have served most of Flendish and some of Staine and Radfield Hundreds, but there is little to suggest the full extent of its responsibilities; the distribution of the Abbey of Ely's estates in 970 suggest that Hadstock once ministered to Chilford Hundred (see Map 3); Godmanchester's responsibilities seem to have extended into Papworth Hundred; on the basis of the deanery boundaries, Cambridge and much of Chesterton Hundred were served from Cambridge; Meldreth almost certainly supported Christianity in Armingford Hundred and the southern part of Wetherley Hundred, while Little Shelford's *parochia* extended over Thriplow Hundred. Nevertheless, not every estate or tenant fell within the limits of such provision. Parts of Cambridgeshire, particularly on the high clays of west Cambridgeshire (Longstowe Hundred) and the far east (Radfield Hundred) may have lain outside any minister's area of parochial responsibility.

VI

From 870 to 917 south Cambridgeshire lay within the Danelaw. The initial impression of the impact of the Viking settlement on ecclesiastical organisation is that it was extremely disruptive: Peterborough was said to have been destroyed and Ely, Horningsea and Soham

were sacked (Whitelock 1979, 192, n.6; cf VCH 1, 199; Haigh 1998, vii). Both Hart and Hadley agree that there is 'little sense of a minster network in the Danelaw' and that minsters were lost as their estates were forcibly appropriated by new Danish lords (Hart, *pers comm*; Hadley 1996, 13). For example, Hadley and Hart have suggested that 'after the Viking settlement, the estate may have been taken over by the ... local ... army settlers' (Hart 1995a, 63; Hadley 1996, 17), while Sawyer has suggested that at Bardney (Lincs) the monastic estate was kept intact only as a result of its acquisition by a powerful Danish layman (Sawyer 1998, 98–9). The most evident Cambridgeshire example is that of the Shelfords: the Great Shelford portion of the minster estate was alienated to a Danish overlord, Sihtric, while the minster at Little Shelford retained just a core 2½ hides of its endowment (Hart 1995a, 63). However, a reconsideration of the evidence suggests that most Cambridgeshire minsters survived the Danelaw, although with reduced estates and influence. This view is supported by Stafford, who has commented that relationships between the church and the Vikings were 'underpinned by the co-operation of local churchmen' (Stafford 1985, 110). Although the extent of Danish involvement in the local administration of Christianity is uncertain, what is known does not contradict this comment. If events at Horningsea were typical, conversion to and toleration of the practice of Christianity by Danish settlers may have been commonplace. Although part of many minster estates appears to have passed into secular hands by or during the later 9th century, most minsters appear to have continued to function, although at a reduced level of activity.

Hadley, too, mediated her previously quoted conclusion by saying that 'it is possible to make a case for elements of continuity in ecclesiastical organisation through the period of Viking settlement' (Hadley 1996, 5). She cites the occupation of the same site by middle Saxon monasteries and minsters with large parishes, and the coincidence of minsters and large estate centres as criteria for continuity (Hadley 1996, 5). These criteria are explored and confirmed for minsters in south Cambridgeshire in Table 1. It will be seen that all six fulfil both criteria, and that there is other evidence for all except Soham that they survived into the 11th century.

The Viking settlement in Cambridgeshire does not seem to have been intensive, and its practical effects on the day-to-day administration and cultivation of the landscape are unlikely to have been extreme. Danish place names in south Cambridgeshire are generally field names, indicating that most of these settlers were peasant farmers living on poorer soils on the periphery of estates. Only two Danish personal names survive as parish names (perhaps the result of the creation or re-naming of a small estate), at Croxton and Caxton, both probably once part of a large estate centred on Eltisley. Since they each include an Anglo-Saxon suffix, it is difficult to know whether these names do indeed represent 9th century Danish settlement or whether they are the result of the assimilation

Table 1. Continuity of site and estate of minsters founded before 870 in south Cambridgeshire into the Danish period and after.

Middle Saxon Minster	Centre of large parish	At or associated with a large estate centre in 1065	Other evidence for continuity into 11th century
Cambridge	Yes	Yes: West fields of Cambridge	11th century Saxon minster
Hadstock	Yes	perhaps, with Linton	Architectural & archaeological evidence for late Saxon minster
Horningley	Yes	Yes: centre of 7 hide estate	9th C document suggests continuity
Little Shelford	Yes	Yes: part of 20 hide estate	Mentioned in Domesday Book
Meldreth	Yes	Yes: rump of 15 hide estate	Mentioned in Domesday Book
Soham	Yes	Yes	No evidence

Sources: Blake 1962, *liv* and 17; *ibid*, 420–421; Foot 1991, 15; Haslam 1982–3, 15; Rodwell 1974, 3; Rumble 1981, 5:26 and 5:30; VCH 2, 141–2;

of a few Vikings into a predominantly Anglo-Saxon population (Reaney 1943, 157–8). Like Bourn and Toft, the only ‘purely Scandinavian’ parish names, they lie towards the less attractive high claylands of the upper Bourn valley, rather than on the richest agricultural soils (Reaney 1943, xix and xxii).

The slow process of fragmentation of multiple estates that seems to have begun before 870 appears to have continued thereafter. Stafford has commented that landowning families found ‘the more novel idea that land granted to the monastery was permanently diverted from hereditary family control proved more difficult to stomach’ while Hadley has observed that the loss of land from minster estates to secular owners occurred before and after, as well as during, the Danish occupation and was not an exclusively Viking characteristic (Stafford 1985, 132 and 118–121, Hadley 1996, 4–5). There were a large number of sokemen holding small independent farms derived from minster estates in the late 11th century and, whatever their origin, they are unlikely to be the descendants of ‘free Danes’. For example, the estate centred on Meldreth

had been fragmented by the mid 10th century, retaining direct control only over its core estate of 1½ hides (Table 2). Although Ely was re-endowed after 970 with a further 2 hides 3 virgates which may once have been part of the minster’s original demesne, the remainder of the minister’s original estate in Meldreth was farmed by sokemen holding between about 25 and 45 acres, while Whaddon was held almost exclusively by sokemen.

The evidence from south Cambridgeshire seems to suggest that most middle-Saxon minsters survived the Viking invasions, retaining their role as mother churches — albeit with reduced influence — until the West Saxon conquest of the Danelaw in the early 10th century, (cf Stafford 1985, 128–134 and 182–189). This conclusion is in line with Blair’s comment that ‘a high proportion of churches controlling mother parishes from the 10th century onwards had been minsters in the eighth and ninth centuries’ (1995, 203). No doubt a period of conflict and uncertainty accompanied the initial invasions, but within two generations the descendants of the Danish settlers appear to have been

Table 2. The fragmentation of minster estates by 1065

Ownership of pre-Danish minster estates in 1086	Hidage in 1086	Owner in 1065
Hadstock	3 hides	Abbey of Ely
Linton	7 hides	given to Abbey of Ely 1008; later sold to Edeva
Horningley	7 hides	Abbey of Ely, acquired c. 975
Little Shelford	4 hides 15a 3½ hides 28 acres	Abbey of Ely & its sokemen 18 sokemen
Great Shelford	9 hides 14 acres 3 hides less 14 acres	Abbey of Ely King
Meldreth	6 hides 15 acres 3 hides 45 acres	Abbey of Ely & its sokemen 7 sokemen
Melbourn	4 hides 45 acres	Abbey of Ely & its sokemen, part of 5 hides given by king in 970
	4½ hides 72½ acres	thegn and 5 sokemen
Whaddon	5 hides 30 acres	Abbey of Ely & its sokemen including 3½ hides given by king in 970
	7 hides 15 acres	6 sokemen

Sources: Rumble 1981 and Hart 1995b. (Italicised place names denote secular estates adjoining minsters’ demesne estates that belonged to the Abbey of Ely before the Norman Conquest and may once have been part of the minster estate.)

assimilated into local society. Horningsea provides documentary evidence of Danish conversion and participation in Christianity; it is hard to square this with the later tradition of its destruction by the Vikings.

VII

The apparent reprieve offered to the old minsters by the West Saxon reconquest of 917 may have been short-lived. Instead, the fragmentation of minster estates and *parochiae* seems to have accelerated after 917. For example, Hadley has suggested that the West Saxon kings appropriated estates which may once have been royal, particularly if they lay near rivers (Hadley 1996, 11 and 17). Soham and Horningsea, (and Godmanchester) fit these criteria well. Soham disappeared at an unknown date after 870 while Horningsea was appropriated by a secular lord during the 10th century (see Appendix). The documentary evidence suggests that the minster at Horningsea survived the Danelaw and continued to operate into the late 10th century, although it was not mentioned in Domesday Book (Blake 1962, 420–421; Rumble 1981, 5:14). If land there were appropriated by secular owners — as seems to have happened — this is as likely to have happened after the West Saxon reconquest as before. In other places the process of nibbling away at minster estates appears to have continued, with much land coming into the hands of free tenant farmers who owed allegiance to members of the West Saxon court, although in most cases minsters seem to have retained a core of their demesne estates — and their influence — into the mid 11th century (Table 2).

Hadley has commented that 'it was a distinct policy of the West Saxons from the 880s to wrest land from monasteries with which to endow royal officials' (Hadley 1996, 4), and it seems likely that the possibility of acquisition of further estates through the reconquest of the Danelaw may have provided a substantial material incentive for secular allies of the Edward the Elder. At Meldreth, for example, nearly 7 hides on the former minster estate was held by 14 sokemen who owed allegiance directly or through an intermediate lord to members of the West Saxon royal family or its very close allies, and in particular to Edeva, the wife of King Harold, and Algar, Earl of East Anglia (Map

4).

VIII

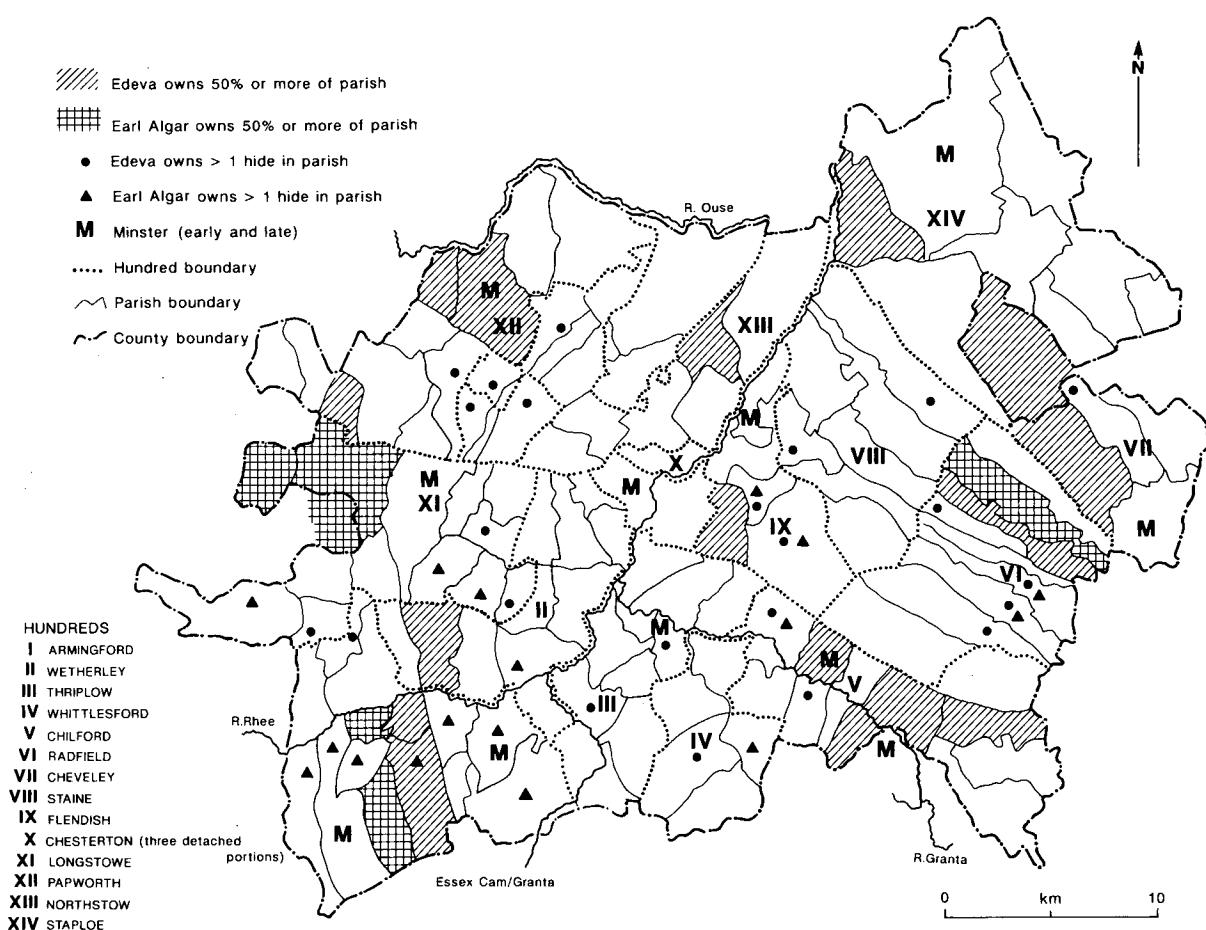
In the late 10th century there appears to have been a pattern of deliberate reconstruction of the estates of surviving old minsters in south Cambridgeshire, which fits well with the determination of the Benedictine revival to ensure that land donated to the church formed a permanent endowment. The estates of minsters which did not survive the Danelaw or the West Saxon reconquest were held exclusively by secular owners in 1086 (see Table 3). The re-foundation of the great monasteries at Ely and Ramsey appears to show an attempt to integrate the old and the new, through the endowment of those abbeys with land which had previously formed the estates of old minsters but which had subsequently returned to secular hands. This conclusion is illustrated by the distribution of the Abbey of Ely's estates in the mid 11th century (see Map 3). From 970 onwards, the Abbey of Ely was given the manors of all four minsters which had survived to a greater or lesser extent into the 10th century: Horningsea, Hadstock, Little Shelford and Meldreth, together with substantial estates in eastern Armingford Hundred around Meldreth and in Thriplow Hundred around Little Shelford. It is similarly possible that the endowment of the Huntingdonshire Abbey of Ramsey with Graveley, Eltisley, Elsworth, and most of the Hemingfords reflects a similar relict *parochia* relating to a royal minster at Godmanchester, whose influence may have straddled the boundary between Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire (Morris 1989, 39–4; Hart 1995a, 63). On the other hand, the Abbey's considerable holdings in Chilford Hundred and the sale of its 7 hides at Linton to Edeva may reflect Hadstock's waning influence and acquiescence with Edeva's plan for the foundation of an estate minster at Great Abington; the failure of the Abbey to consolidate its holdings around Horningsea may similarly reflect the latter's weak local status after 917.

During the 10th century, the influence of early minsters and their rights to tithes were increasingly affected by owners of substantial properties who established minsters to serve only their own estates

Table 3. Ownership of possible pre-Danish minsters and monastic houses in c. 1065

	Survives into the 10th century	Owner 1065	Status of its estate in 1065	Owner before 870
Hadstock	only just	Abbey of Ely	undivided	Royal
Horningsea	perhaps	Abbey of Ely	undivided	Royal
Lt Shelford	Yes	Abbey of Ely	divided : royal & monastic	n.k.
Meldreth	Yes	Abbey of Ely	divided : monastic & royal	n.k.
Cambridge	Yes	King	undivided	Royal
Soham	No	King	divided: royal & monastic	Royal
Eltisley	No	Earl Algar	undivided	Pandionia
(Cherry) Hinton	No	Edeva	undivided	n.k.

Sources: Rumble 1981; Appendix.



Map 4. The south Cambridgeshire estates of Edeva and Earl Algar as recorded in Domesday Book

(estate minsters). The effect of this attrition of the powers and rights of the old minsters was the almost total disappearance of old minsters from Cambridgeshire by the time of the Norman conquest. Unlike the old minsters, these new churches only administered to tenants on the owner's estate, even if the estate was made up of just fragments of vills, expropriating the tithes of the estate from the old minster to the new estate minster and underpinning secular lordly domination with ecclesiastical control. There are five churches in south Cambridgeshire which may have been founded as estate minsters: Steeple Morden, Bourn, Swavesey, Great Abington and, perhaps, Kirtling (see Appendix).

The distribution of these estate minsters suggests that at least two may have been built to fill a vacuum created by the loss of an old minster during or after the Danelaw. For example, the inclusion of the minster at Hadstock in the county of Essex after 917 only makes sense if its influence as a minster church in Cambridgeshire was virtually non-existent by the early 10th century (it is said to have been sacked by the Danes and may be an example of a church which did not survive the Danelaw). The establishment of an estate minster at Great Abington to serve Edeva's estates in Chilford Hundred may have been intended as

a replacement for Hadstock's loss. Similarly, the pre-Danish minster at Godmanchester seems to have lost its *parochia* by the late 11th century; its function appears to have been assumed at least partly by the royal estate minsters at Swavesey and Great Paxton (Hunts). A lacuna in Longstowe Hundred may have been filled by a new estate minster at Bourn, which had two priests and 120 acres of land in 1086 (Rumble 1981, 32:23).

Complementing, and sometimes competing with, the ecclesiastical provision of the new estate minsters, manorial and other churches also began to be built from the 10th century onwards, to serve areas more similar to those of modern parishes.⁵ Many Cambridgeshire parishes appear to have been created and to have acquired their own churches by the early 11th century, and is likely that there were more for which the documentary or physical evidence has not survived. Some were manorial churches. Others — in parishes where there was no resident manorial lord or his representative — seem to have been built as the result of co-operation between tenant owners of relatively small properties. For example, the area of Cambridgeshire with least evidence for 8th or 9th century minster churches is the northern portion of Wetherley Hundred and the western portion of

Table 4. 10th century religious sculpture in south Cambridgeshire

Free-standing crosses	Other evidence for minster status	Grave covers with interlace work	Other evidence for minster status
Cambridge castle	Yes	Cambridge castle	Yes
Cherry Hinton	No	Horningsea	Yes
Fulbourn	No	Little Shelford	Yes
Stapleford	No	Balsham	No
Rampton	No	Grantchester	No
Willingham	No	Little St Mary	No
		Rampton	No
		Whittlesford	No
		Willingham	No

Sources: Fox 1920, 15–17; PCAS XXXII

Longstowe Hundred, where there was a high proportion of sokemen and bordars. Here middle Saxon small landowners may have lacked the large estates which facilitated the establishment of minsters; but by the 10th and 11th centuries it was these parishes which appear to have seen the establishment of parish churches as a communal enterprise between these individual smallholders, indicating considerable religious interest and enthusiasm for organised Christianity among the lay population (Oosthuizen 1997).

It seems that the old minsters in Cambridgeshire were already losing their battle to control their original *parochiae* by the late 10th century. This may have been well-accepted: the Abbey of Ely seems to have had no qualms about founding churches on its newly acquired estates from 970 onwards, as the church at Balsham (recorded in 1010) demonstrates; Ramsey exhibited the same policy, for example at Knapwell, where the church was recorded by 1000 (VCH 6, 132; VCH 9, 333).

Finally, the body of pre-conquest sculpture in Cambridgeshire deserves mention (Table 4). With the exception of the minsters at Cambridge, Horningsea and Little Shelford, these crosses and grave slabs are not found at places for which other evidence might suggest the existence of a minster. It is more likely that they marked outlying graveyards or other sites for worship which later received a church, or that they expressed individual pride in a new/existing manorial church (Blair 1988b, 57; Hadley 1996, 8–9; Hart 1995a, 59–60). Blair has commented on ‘the sudden plethora of carved tombstones in the 10th and 11th centuries, [indicating that] private manorial churches had begun to rival minsters as favoured burial sites for the thegny classes’, a conclusion supported by other research (Blair 1988a, 8; Stafford 1985, 174; Pearce 1985, 273). Rampton, for example, has always been a poor out-settlement from Willingham. Stapleford is similarly unlikely to have been a minster since it neighbours the Shelfords.

In conclusion, the evidence explored in the preceding pages suggests that the vitality of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon Cambridgeshire was affected at least as

much by wider historical processes as by the Danish invasion, and did not differ markedly in character from the rest of Anglo-Saxon England during the period c. 650–1060.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

I. Anglo-Saxon Minsters founded in Cambridgeshire before 870 AD

1. Horningsea

Horningsea is the most commonly quoted and only documented example of an early collegiate minster in Cambridgeshire, a claim supported by documentary, topographical, architectural and archaeological evidence.

The early monastery was claimed by the Liber Eliensis to have been founded in the earlier 9th century, destroyed by the Danes in about 870 AD, and afterwards to have been ‘restored and endowed by the local inhabitants’ (VCH 2, 200).

‘Before the madness of the pagans ravaging in East Anglia boiled over into Cambridgeshire and gave the land over to waste and desolation, there was a minster of royal rank at Horningsea where a substantial community of clerks existed. At the time when the pagan army was ravaging in the area, the priest Cenwold exercised sacerdotal office there. Later the people of the place who had joined together from paganism in the grace of baptism gave this minster five hides at Horningsea and two at Eye. When Cenwold died the priest Herewulf succeeded to his position. Since he was a retainer of King Athelstan, he held the position under his guardian-

ship and protection' (Foot 1991, 15, my emphasis).

It is a matter of enormous regret that this splendid reference is the only one to survive for Cambridgeshire. In a few sentences, the minster status of the church with confirmation of collegiate status, its royal connections and its substantial endowment of 7 hides is laid bare. Most interesting is the evidence for continuity of function, and even for the conversion of Danish settlers after the Danish conquest of 870.

As the Cam defined the core zone of the boundary between East Anglia and Mercia up to the 9th century, perhaps the establishment of royal minsters at Horningsea and Soham (see below) with close links to the royal abbey at Ely may have been a defensive East Anglian shot across the bows of attempts at Mercian expansion across the Cam.

There are topographical parallels with other early minster sites. Horningsea parish (which at that time included Fen Ditton) lies on a promontory surrounded by water: the Cam in the west and low fen in the north and east. The promontory was cut off from the mainland by a possibly prehistoric ditch and bank (RCHME 1972, 146), for which there are parallels with Bardney, Lincs, where an 'ancient ditch' was cut across the isthmus, cutting off Bardney island from the mainland (Stocker 1993, 108). Roman settlement at Horningsea may have been an additional factor in the choice of site for this minster, since Blair comments on the close relationship between minster sites and Romano-British settlement (Blair 1992, 235–240).

The precinct and site of the 9th century minster at Horningsea is not definitely known but it may have been quite extensive, including several churches within the precinct (Blair 1992, 246). Blair has observed that 'a minster was normally set amidst its own lands and housed within its own enclosure' (Blair 1992, 231). Stocker has commented that 'detached retreats [often called Biggin] within the island precinct were a feature of important pre-Viking monasteries' (Stocker 1993, 108). The Biggin is still a prominent outlying farm on the Horningsea peninsula. It belonged to the Abbey of Ely throughout the medieval period and had probably formed part of the estate of the minster at Horningsea. A clue to the original size of the precinct may be the eight stones lying along a line about 700m south of the church running eastwards along a road from the Cam just south of the Biggin, shown on the 6" 1884 OS map. They have now disappeared, but an indication of their size can still be gained from the southern verge of this road, which bulges in curves of about 2m in radius from the edge of the verge into the neighbouring ploughed field in the places where the map shows the stones once stood. Both the modern church and the Biggin lie close to docks and cuts from the Cam (Ordnance Survey), a relationship commented on by Stocker and Blair (Stocker 1993, 106; Blair 1992, 227).

Perhaps significantly Horningsea is the only church in Cambridgeshire where possible evidence for Anglo-Saxon *porticus* (side chapels containing subsidiary altars) survives. These are commonly found at minsters, as the examples at nearby Brixworth show.

The church also contains a late 10th century coffin lid fragment (RCHME 1972, 65–66, 68).

It seems most unlikely that the minster at Horningsea was destroyed in the Viking invasions, since there is documentary evidence of its endowment (or, more likely, confirmation of its re-endowment) in this period. Blake has commented that Horningsea 'appears to have had a continuous history and to have been regarded as a hereditary property by the priest, Herulf, to whom King Athelstan gave it. When it was bought by Bishop Æthelwold from King Edgar, the bishop had a long struggle to recover land then held by [the priest Wulfric] a kinsman of the priest Cenwold, as well as other land which the priest Athelstan, kinsman of Herulf, claimed as his own' (Blake 1962, xii).

This long quotation has several implications: that the minster continued in existence right up until the late 10th century when it was acquired by Ely; that at least some of the minster lands had been appropriated by the West Saxon royal family who had granted them as a private estate to one or more of the minster priests; that these grants had fragmented the original endowment into 3 components, consisting of 2 and 3 hides at Horningsea and another 2 hides at Eye (Blake 1962, 421); and that the different branches of the family sold the various parts of the original minster estate to Ely in a number of transactions beginning with two hides sold to Bishop Æthelwold in about 975 (*ibid*). The priests at Horningsea seem to have commended themselves and the minster to the West Saxon kings after 917, who imposed 'the king's personal lordship upon the Danish landowners. Rather than becoming the subjects of an English king, they chose Edward as their ... lord and protector (my emphasis)', (Abels 1988, 82). Horningsea also conforms to Fleming's comment that the West Saxon kings often expropriated strategically placed religious lands, particularly where they lay against rivers and important frontiers (quoted in Hadley 1996, 4).

2. Soham

A *monasterium* is said to have been founded by St Felix at Soham in 631 AD near the western boundary of his new East Anglian diocese (VCH 2, 141). He was said also to have been buried at Soham and his remains were returned to Soham for safety during the late 9th century Danish raids, suggesting a relationship with the place during his lifetime (VCH 2, 141; Warner 1997, 128). Since 7th century bishops were closely associated with both the senior monasteries from which they worked and their royal patrons, the identification of Soham as St Felix's minster seems reasonable since it is supported by Soham's dependence on the nearby royal vill at Exning (Blake 1962, 17; also see below; cf Stocker 1993, 115).

Soham lies on an outlying part of a substantial East Anglian royal estate centred on Exning, where the princesses Æthelthryth and Wendreda were born and where there had been a substantial Roman villa. With Fordham and Isleham, Soham still formed a solid block of ancient royal demesne in 1086; these three

manors still provided food rents before 1066 (see note 3(b) below). All three lie in Staploe Hundred. The hundred and deanery boundaries run along a substantial 5th or 6th century earthwork, the Devil's Dyke. Staploe Hundred is the only part of Cambridgeshire within the Diocese of Norwich, the diocese based on the ancient kingdom of East Anglia; the rest of south Cambridgeshire lies in the Diocese of Ely (and before that in the Diocese of Lincoln, which superseded the Diocese of Dorchester). Curiously, there is a (probably spurious) 11th century claim that King Alfred gave the manors of Isleham and Freckenham to the Bishop of Rochester (VCH 1, 353). Although the claim is doubtful, it is nonetheless interesting for its underlying premise that this block was anciently royal.

An early church is known to have existed near the present parish church, and its cemetery included early Anglo-Saxon graves (Meaney 1966, 69). Many religious houses of the period contained several churches within the religious precinct, and the possibility of two contemporary churches existing so close to each other is intriguing (Blair 1992, 246). There was significant Anglo-Saxon settlement at Soham which is rich in burials throughout the period (Cambridgeshire County Sites and Monuments Record (hereafter CCC SMR)).

Topographical evidence is also supportive. The sites of the early church and the present parish church lie close to each other near the highest point of a hill standing on a long promontory stretching out into the fen. The surrounding settlement is defined by a sub-rectangular 'characteristic' perimeter road whose corners coincide with the entrances of routes to other settlements, notably towards the major monastery at Ely and the royal vill at Exning (Blair 1992, 233; Oosthuizen 1996, 36). It is possible that this pattern fossilises the original minster precinct. Soham's proximity to the River Ouse and its ancient royal connections may indicate that it disappeared after the West Saxon kingdom reconquered Danish Cambridgeshire in 917 (Hadley 1996, 11 and 17).

3. Cambridge

A royal minster may have been founded at Cambridge in the later 8th century when a new Mercian burh reoccupied the site of the old Roman town on the north bank of the Cam (Haslam 1984, 15). Haslam has pointed to the proximity of this church to the royal manor at Chesterton — also part of ancient royal demesne in 1066 — and noted Blair's suggestion that royal minsters were generally built 'at some distance from their counterpart royal *villae*, often in Roman enclosures with the *villae* outside on open ground' (Haslam 1984, 17–19; Blair 1988b, 35).

Its parish was exactly coterminous with the western fields of Cambridge — that is, with the Anglo-Saxon estate of Cambridge. The minster was replaced in the late 11th century by a priory of Canons Regular (now represented by St Giles' church) 'whose houses often succeeded and took over the properties and duties of the Anglo-Saxon minsters of secular priests'

(Haslam 1984, 17). Substantial numbers of high quality 10th century grave covers have been found near the presumed site of this church, and there may have been several churches within the precinct, including that of St Peter (Haslam 1984, 19; cf Blair 1992, 246).

Note on Little Shelford and Meldreth (below)

The churches at Meldreth and Little Shelford are included in this list although it is possible that they had been founded as estate minsters by Ely after its acquisition of these estates in the late 10th century. The argument for their origin as middle Anglo-Saxon minsters rests in part on the Abbey of Ely's active role in founding local, parish churches on its newly acquired manors, for example, the late 10th century churches at Hauxton, which neighbours Little Shelford, and at Whaddon, which neighbours Meldreth (VCH 8, 202; Oosthuizen 1994, 97). The establishment by the Abbey of estate minsters and parish churches in neighbouring parishes in same period does not make sense, since parish churches would alienate tithes which should be reserved to the minster. It is more likely that the minsters were already in existence when Ely received these estates in the late 10th century. If these minsters already existed by the late 10th century, then they might be Danish or pre-Danish foundations. Let us examine the hypothesis of Danish foundation. A Danish foundation might mean that the minsters' estates would be more likely to be intact in the mid- to late 10th century, provided that they survived the depredations of the West Saxon kings after 917. On the basis of this premise, a Danish foundation is unlikely since it was exactly during the mid- to late 10th century that the king and bishop Æthelwold needed to buy secular estates to secure minsters' endowments in the area around these minsters. For example, in c. 960 the king endowed Ely with a 15 hide estate around Meldreth, together with the 'soke of Meldreth', made up of the parishes of Meldreth, Melbourn and Whaddon (VCH 8, 67, 147, 352). Similarly, between 870 and 917 the Shelfords were the caput of a large estate belonging to Sihtric, the Danish overlord of Cambridgeshire (Hart 1992, 11). Although the minster retained 2½ hides of its original endowment, the rest of the estate was gifted in stages from secular owners to the Abbey of Ely in the late 10th century (Hart 1995a, 46). This reversal of the dismemberment of the minsters' estates means that it is more likely that Little Shelford and Meldreth were not Danish minsters, but had been founded before 870 and survived the Danelaw and the West Saxon conquest with much diminished possessions and influence (Hart 1995a, 63, agrees with this conclusion).

4. Little Shelford

Little Shelford is one of two minsters mentioned in the Cambridgeshire Domesday. It still retained substantial estate of 2½ hides in 1086, part of larger unit of just over 13 hides in Shelford belonging to the Abbey of Ely (Rumble 1981, 5:26). Blair suggests that a high proportion of churches controlling mother parishes from the 10th century onwards had been minsters in the 8th

and 9th centuries, a suggestion supported for Shelford by Hart and by the argument below (Blair 1995, 199; Hart 1995a).

Substantial intercommoning and inter-tithing between Shelford, Harston, Hauxton and Newton (together a substantial part of Thriplow Hundred) until the 19th century, and Newton's status as a chapelry of Hauxton, supports the argument that these parishes were once part of a larger estate, and that a pre-Danish minster at Shelford might have served a *parochia* covering much of what later became Thriplow Hundred, (VCH 8, 152 and 223).

Little Shelford is illuminated by Hadley's comment that there is a 'striking correlation between sites of middle Anglo-Saxon monasteries and the locations of later mother churches' and that these sites consistently coincide with the great estate centres of Domesday Book (Hadley 1996, 5). Hart has shown that before 917 the Shelfords were the estate centre, rated at 20 hides, of the Danish earl Sihtric who controlled the whole Cambridge region (Hart 1995a, 46 and 52). The late 10th century reconstitution of the estate seems to have been thoughtful and planned: King Edgar promised Bishop Æthelwold 4½ hides at Hauxton and 3 hides at Newton for the re-endowment of the Abbey at Ely but died before the gift could be confirmed; the estate was bought for Ely before his death in 991 by Brithnoth, together with a large estate at Thriplow (VCH 8, 196 and 239).

Ely's acquisition of these estates in Thriplow Hundred suggests that it had been endowed with an older minster whose control over its *parochia* was declining, and that it consolidated its core Shelford estate through purchase and bequest throughout Thriplow Hundred, subsequently setting to work to build daughter churches on its new estates, such as that at Hauxton built soon after 970. The loss of tithes to the minster church may not have been a significant issue, since the minster and the daughter churches were now part of the same ecclesiastical organisation.

It is possible that Little Shelford church stands on the site of or within the precinct of the middle Saxon minster church. Although the site is not particularly low-lying or marshy, it is close to the Cam and the shallow fords of the place name. The minster precinct may also have included the manorial site since Hardwin de Scalers expropriated 4 hides and 15 acres controlled by the minster at Shelford. His manor lies between the church and the river, possibly carved from the minster demesne (Rumble 1981, 26:18). The existing boundaries of the manor, vicarage and church almost certainly do not indicate the original extent of the precinct, which remains frustratingly obscure. A considerable number of 10th century carved stone fragments are embedded in the wall of Little Shelford church, but this adds little to our understanding of the early history of this church, beyond confirming significant Christian activity at the site before the Conquest.

5. Meldreth

Meldreth, the other Cambridgeshire minster mentioned in 1086, also belonged to the Abbey of Ely, to

whom it had been granted by King Edgar in 970 (VCH 8, 69). Although the *monasterium* itself was endowed with only 1½ hides in 1086, it was the centre of a much larger estate of more than 15 hides which included a further 6 hides in Meldreth, 5 hides in Whaddon and over 4 hides in Melbourn (Rumble 1981, 5:30–32; 5:29, 14:30, 26:27; 5:34, 31:2). Ely's retention of the soke of this substantial estate of over 15 hides in the 11th century and extensive intercommoning between Meldreth, Melbourn and Whaddon, which continued until enclosure in the 19th century, suggests that all of Armingford Hundred east of Ermine Street had been a single 30 hide estate at one time (VCH 8, 67, 147, 352). Ely's Melbourn manor — significantly called the Bury — lay close to a major Romano-British settlement and administered the Abbey's estates in Meldreth and Melbourn. An early 7th century Christian graveyard has been found at Melbourn, perhaps an outlying graveyard looking to the minster for support (Wilson 1956, 29–41). Considerable detail about the working of an 8th century multiple estate can be inferred from these details.

Meldreth is well-placed in relation to Arrington, which may have been the royal *-tun* at the centre of a *regio* which originally included Armingford as well as parts of Longstowe and Wetherley Hundreds (Sawyer 1983, 293–299). Since Arrington is in Wetherley Hundred but gave its name to Armingford Hundred, it is possible that Meldreth was a royal minster serving all of the latter and at least the southern portion of the former (perhaps the area south of Mare Way).

Meldreth churchyard conforms to the topographical criterion that minsters are often found in river valleys on island or promontory positions, and well-placed for waterborne communication (Blair 1992, 227). It lies within a triangular promontory in the valley of the Cam surrounded by water on three sides. The chancel of Meldreth church is unusually long, suggesting that it may be a rebuilding on the original plan of the early minster chancel which was still served by 5 priests in 1086.

6. Godmanchester

St Mary's, Godmanchester (Hunts) is included because its *parochia* may have included parishes on the clay uplands to its south. Very little is known about the past history of this church. Its siting just to the north of the Roman town of Godmanchester is characteristic of a Roman mausoleum that may have become the focus for Christian worship (Morris 1989, 39–40; Green 1977, 24). The discovery of a Roman lead tank in the Ouse near Godmanchester may indicate a Roman Christian community, while a Carolingian purse mount re-worked as a Christian cross 'suggests a strong Christian presence in the town in the 7th century' (H J M Green, pers comm).

The extent to which St Mary's *parochia* may have extended southwards into Cambridgeshire is difficult to determine. The southern boundary of the territory of the Roman town at Godmanchester may have lain along the present parish boundary with Papworth St Agnes as far as the Romanised road

between Eltisley and Cambridge (Green 1977, 16). However, by the middle ages Godmanchester's open fields had extended southwards to include lands in Papworth St Agnes (H J M Green, pers comm). This suggests that the clay upland parishes to the south may have acted as a common resource for parishes in the southern Ouse valley (cf Everitt 1986, 148–9). If the multiple estate of the minster at Godmanchester extended onto these southern clays, this would explain the use of the Papworth place name for the hundred: *pappa* = priest (*Current Archaeology* 1977, 378; though Reaney (1943, 171) suggests a personal name). Since the hundreds were almost certainly created in or about 917, the estate belonging to the 'priest(s)' must predate it, and cannot be later than c. 900. Curiously, it has been suggested that *pappa* has a Norse origin (Morris 1989, 161), and this, combined with the Anglo-Saxon *-worth* may support the suggestion of a pre-870 origin for the minster, since it may imply Danish recognition of a minster estate.⁶

Why should the Papworths have belonged to a putative minster at Godmanchester rather than to a probable nunnery at Eltisley? First, because of the place name: since the nunnery does not appear to have also functioned as a minster, its dependencies would have been more likely to have been referred to through elements referring to 'the *nuns*' rather than to priests, leading to place names like Nunsworth or Hinworth; and second because of the Papworths' physical situation on the *northern* side of a northwest to southeast ridge, which is a parish boundary along its length and which follows a Romanised ridgeway; Eltisley lies to the south of this ridge. Since the boundary is continuous it is also likely to have been ancient and used as an estate boundary. Godmanchester is the most likely pre-Danish estate centre north of the ridge.

If there were a minster estate centred on St Mary's, Godmanchester, before 870 it had disappeared by the mid 11th century. The church had just one priest in 1086 and does not seem to have had a particularly large endowment. Like Soham and Horningsea, Godmanchester lies beside a large river and is anciently royal — this may mean that its decline can be dated to the early 10th century West Saxon reconquest of the Danelaw. By contrast, the royal estate minster in the neighbouring parish of Great Paxton was built in the 11th century and was endowed with a hide of land, implying that the old minster was obsolete by this time (Harvey 1975, 1:10 and 20:8). The late 10th century endowment of Ramsey Abbey with so many parishes bordering the Papworths (Graveley, Yelling (Hunts), Elsworth, Knapwell, Hilton and most of the Hemingfords) may have been an attempt at reconstituting former minster estates through their grant to a new religious house.

7. Hadstock

The large minster church at Hadstock was founded in the 7th century, perhaps by St Botolph, another East Anglian bishop. It lies just south of the Cambridge county boundary in Essex (Rodwell 1974). The case for Hadstock's status as a major Anglo-Saxon

minster has been made by Rodwell (*op cit*). The church stands at the top of a hill, commanding the surrounding countryside. It is included in this list of Cambridgeshire minsters since its parish boundaries form a regular rectangle with those of its northern neighbour, Linton. The two parishes may once have formed a single 10-hide estate, made up of 3 hides at Hadstock (owned by Ely in 1086) and 7 hides at Linton (acquired by Ely in 1008). The early 11th century distribution of Ely manors in Chilford Hundred may reflect an attempt at the reconstruction of a *parochia* which covered much of Chilford Hundred. However, Hadstock's influence had waned sufficiently by the late 10th century, for it to be separated from Linton and placed in Essex after 917. The sale of Linton to Edeva by the Abbey of Ely after 1008 and the existence of an estate minster on Edeva's estate at Great Abington by 1086 may reflect a pragmatic rapprochement between Ely and the major landowners in Chilford Hundred, which took account of the diminishing influence of the old minsters,

The next two sites, Eltisley and Cherry Hinton, are included since they are often mentioned in the context of pre-conquest minsters in Cambridgeshire. Neither is likely to have been a minster, but it is possible that both are pre-Danish nunneries which did not survive, for whatever reason. It is a truism that post-Conquest nunneries found survival difficult, since they were usually less well-endowed than monasteries; it is possible that the same held true for pre-conquest nunneries. There is a little evidence for this in the form of Asser's note that a house of nuns appealed to Alfred for support as they were so poor (Hadley 1996, 3).

8. Eltisley

Eltisley is said (on the basis of the writings of a post-medieval antiquary) to have been the site of a nunnery founded in honour of St Pandionia, a 10th century Scottish princess (VCH 5, 55–6). The nunnery is believed to have been moved to Hinchingbrooke, near Huntingdon soon after the Conquest (VCH 5, 55). However, since there is no mention of the house in the Cambridgeshire or Huntingdonshire Domesday Book, it makes sense to revise the history for the house backwards. Since there is no evidence that it was an estate minster, since the evidence for its date is late and therefore possibly unreliable, and since the house had disappeared by the 11th century, it is more likely that Eltisley was a failed nunnery which was founded some time before 870 and disappeared either before or shortly after 917. That there was some foundation to the story is suggested both by the unusual dedication to St Pandionia, Eltisley's appearance in reliable lists of Anglo-Saxon saints and the church's unusually large endowment (Rollason 1978, 71; VCH 5, 56).

It is worth exploring its dedication, its endowment and its topography in more detail. Thacker has emphasised 'how closely cult and *monasterium* were linked in early Anglo-Saxon England', going on to suggest that 'it now seems likely that a great many,

perhaps most, *monasteria* housed a cult of some kind, even if it was only some highly restricted devotion to a little-known member of the founder's family' (Thacker 1992, 166). The present church is still dedicated to St Pandionia; a well bearing her name stood in the churchyard until the 19th century, and Saints Pandiona and Windritha were mentioned at Eltisley in early medieval lists (VCH 5, 57; Rollason 1978, 71).

By the mid 11th century Eltisley church owned 100 acres of an undivided vill belonging to Earl Algar and assessed at 3 hides (Rumble 1981, 16:1; VCH 5, 56). It seems unlikely that a parish of only just over 2 hides could originally have supported a church with such a large endowment. The vill's assessment and single owner in 1066 suggests it was been the relict core of a once larger, and now fragmented, estate. Eltisley was one of the few undivided estates owned by Earl Algar in Cambridgeshire. The rest of the estate is suggested by the assessment of Croxton, where Algar owned 6 of the 7 hides, and which makes 10 hides with Eltisley, and perhaps by Caxton, where Algar owned 6 out of 10 hides. Together these three parishes would make a substantial estate of 20 hides along the clay watershed between the Cam and the Ouse.

During the middle ages Eltisley's 100 acres of glebe made it one of the richest benefices in the deanery; Cambridgeshire vicars were generally forced to content themselves with between 15 and 30 acres (VCH 5, 56; Hart 1995a, 60). This is remarkably close to the hide (120 acres) which seems to have been the smallest endowment still owned by minsters in Cambridgeshire in 1086.

The church's topographical position is suggestive, but not conclusive. It lies along an ancient Romanised ridgeway, on a high clay plateau, thus with good communications with both the Ouse and the Cam valleys. It has significant associations with water: there is a well in the churchyard and active springs immediately to the south. The present church has a cruciform appearance, since it has both south and north transepts. However, there is no pre-Norman work in the church, and it is difficult to know whether this plan is coincidental or the result of rebuilding on an earlier cruciform plan.

9. (*Cherry*) Hinton

The interpretation of this place name as a nunnery was rejected by Reaney in 1943 on the grounds that it is not supported by any documentary evidence for a monastic house (Reaney 1943, 141). This does not seem sufficient to exclude it altogether, however, and it has been included here as a case needing further investigation. It is not very likely that there could have been an old minster on this site, since it is close to both Horningsea and Cambridge. The discovery of a cemetery with an Anglo-Saxon headstone does not make the case any stronger, as argued above (Table 4). Once more, a failed nunnery — as the place name suggests — is the more likely explanation.

II : Late Saxon Minsters in Cambridgeshire

10. Swavesey

After the Norman conquest, land at Swavesey was granted to a house of Augustinian canons and this may well indicate the refoundation of a pre-conquest minster church, a conclusion drawn by earlier writers (VCH 9, 393; Hart 1995a, 59). There is topographical, architectural and other evidence to support this. The house was sited on a small island, surrounded by water, just north of the promontory on which the settlement stands. It is isolated from the latter by, but linked to the wider world along, a major watercourse leading from the settlement to the Ouse. The church is one of the few in Cambridgeshire to show strong evidence of early 11th century Anglo-Saxon construction, with long and short work in the chancel and also in the southeast and northeast corners of the nave (VCH 9, 395). Before the Norman Conquest Swavesey was the centre of a large estate belonging to Edeva the Fair, with berewicks at Haslingfield, Papworth Everard, Toft, Waterbeach and Wimpole (VCH 9, 381). A medieval dispute over tithes suggests that Fen Drayton may also have been included in the estate (VCH 9, 300). Swavesey conforms to Hadley's criterion that most dominant mother churches tend to be in a large estate in the exclusive possession of a single lord (Hadley 1996, 16), and its history and manorial connections suggests that it was founded as an estate minster in the 10th century.

11. Great Abington

Edeva held the whole of Little Abington before the Conquest, when it was valued at 5 hides. She also held a hide at Great Abington of which the tenant was a priest 'who could not withdraw without her permission' and is likely to be part of the endowment of the church (Rumble 1981, 14:14, 29:10). Since the division of Abington had presumably occurred before Edeva's acquisition of the estate there (since she did not own both vills), and since the minster in Great Abington still formed part of her estate at that time, perhaps the minster at Great Abington originated as an estate minster and was retained to minister to all of Edeva's estates in Chilford Hundred. There is some tentative architectural evidence for a pre-conquest church at Little Abington, perhaps a manorial chapel which later evolved into the parish church (Woudhuysen 1997, 17).

12. Steeple Morden

There is good evidence for the establishment of an 11th century estate minster at Steeple Morden. Eight of Steeple Morden's 10 hides, together with outlying land at Abington Pigotts, Litlington and Clopton, was given to the Abbey of Winchester in 1015 by the Atheling (Hart 1995b, 82). There is evidence to suggest that Winchester may subsequently have founded an estate minster at Steeple Morden to provide spiritual leadership within its new estate.

Since funeral masses from Winchester's outlying estates at Clopton and Abington Pigotts were held in

Steeple Morden church, and since tenants at Abington Pigotts also had to be buried at Steeple Morden, this suggests that Steeple Morden church received the ancient tithe of soulscot (VCH 8, 120). Only pre-conquest *ealden mynsters* received these tithes (Whitelock 1979, 431, 444). Since Clopton in turn received some tithes from estates in East Hatley, Croydon and Tadlow, perhaps it originated as a daughter church serving the outlying parishes in the northwest part of the hundred (VCH 8, 40).

Architectural evidence at Steeple Morden church is only suggestive. Before its tower fell in the 17th century, the church may have been cruciform. It had a 20-foot square central tower, a possible indicator of minster status. The pre-17th century chancel was unusually long at 42 feet, and this too suggests that it was originally built to accommodate an unusually large number of priests.

It is unlikely that the minster was established much before the early 10th century. In his work on the pre-conquest minsters belonging to the Abbey of Winchester, Hase has noted that 'the vast bulk of the .. Old Minister's estates in 1086 ... were 10th or 11th century grants' (Hase 1988, 48). He suggested a motive for the construction of estate churches on Winchester's lands: 'it was apparently felt ... to be inappropriate for any manor of the old minster ... to be parochially subject to a mother church not in the bishop's control : each of these grants, therefore, tended to result in the foundation of a new parish church independent of the old mother church' (Hase 1988, 48). This may explain the emergence of Steeple Morden within what should have been the *parochia* of the possible pre-Danish minster at Meldreth discussed above.

The dedication to SS Peter and Paul is curious since the subsidiary chapel at Abington Pigotts is dedicated to Winchester's patron, St Swithun. There are three possible explanations for the fact that the dedication at Steeple Morden does not relate to the Abbey's patron saint, in contrast to the dedication at Abington Pigotts:

1. that this was the dedication that Winchester originally chose, rather than their patron saint. This is possible if they were recognising the royal grant, since this dedication would not be unusual for a royal or thegnly church.
2. that the dedication was originally to St Swithun but has been changed since then. This is also quite possible, and the process has occurred at other Cambridgeshire churches.
3. the church was already dedicated to SS Peter and Paul before 1015, that is that the church already existed before 1015. This explanation depends on the royal estate given to Winchester being the same size before 1015. The pattern of land ownership in the western part of Armingford Hundred before 1066 suggests that this area was a large royal estate including Litlington, Bassingbourn, Shingay and Wendy, which was later granted away in pieces to members of the royal family and household (Earl Algar, Edeva the Fair, Asgar the Staller and the Abbey of Winchester). There is no evidence that

Steeple Morden ever served a larger estate than that belonging to the Abbey of Winchester, and it is more likely that it was founded after 1015 than before.

An interesting feature at Steeple Morden is its sub-circular graveyard. It is one of only two sites in Cambridgeshire with an apparent *llan* layout (the other, curiously, is Abington Pigotts). It is curious to find this plan at Steeple Morden where there is no other evidence to suggest any pre-Danish significance to the site. Fieldwork will be needed to confirm whether the erection of a large cruciform church involved the extension of the graveyard westward across the original line of the road and the long chancel forced the diverted road even further east, or whether the church lies on a site of earlier importance (Blair 1992, 231). The *llan* may be an artefact resulting from the construction of a large church on a restricted site rather than the relic of an ancient religious site.

13. Bourn

An estate minster is suggested at Bourn by the presence in 1086 of two priests and a substantial endowment of one hide of land which 'they could not separate outside of the church' (Rumble 1981, 32:23; Blair 1998a, 7). The combined Domesday assessment of 25 hides for Bourn, Longstowe and Caldecote together as well as the evidence of indented parish boundaries (which generally divide these parishes along field boundaries) suggests the original extent of this estate. The parish church at Caldecote originated as a chapel of the mother church at Bourn (VCH 5, 13).

The thegnly status of this church is supported by King Edward's code 2 of 959–963: 'If there is any thegn who has on his bookland a church with which there is a graveyard, he is to pay the third part of his own tithe into his church' since Picot granted only two-thirds of his tithes at Bourn and Caldecote to his new priory of Barnwell in the late 11th century (Whitelock 1979, 431; VCH 5, 23–4). Although this does not prove that Bourn church was a mother church before the conquest, a 150-year old regulation may only have been enforced at churches which had been founded in or about the time the regulation was initially promulgated, and may not have applied to newer churches.

14. Kirtling

Kirtling was owned by Harold before the Conquest, and may originally have been a royal manor. The church at Kirtling was originally cruciform (A P Baggs, pers comm). It may have been the estate minster for royal estates along the east Cambridgeshire border, including Borough Green (where Edeva (Harold's wife) had a deer park), and Cheveley, another royal manor. The church has an interesting tympanum over the south door.

15. Burwell

The evidence for a minster at Burwell is contradictory and inconclusive, and is included here only because it is so ambivalent. It hinges on two pieces of evidence:

the place name and archaeological evidence for an early Christian cemetery and church to the north of the present parish church.

The '-*burh*' place name occasionally seems to have acquired a secondary sense of 'minster' (Blair 1992, 234). However Reaney suggests that in this case the place name is related to a defensive site, and this view is supported by Foard's identification with this place name element of the reuse of pre-Saxon fortified sites (Reaney 1943, 188; Foard 1985, 207–8). This topographical interpretation of the place name is likely at Burwell where the church is sited on high ground on a promontory overlooking the fen-edge, and where the land falls away very steeply towards the west and the spring to which the place name refers. A curvilinear perimeter road surrounds this hill, but it may be based on an earlier fortification (A P Baggs, pers comm). A Roman villa lies just beyond the spring a few hundred yards to the west of the site. Although it may be possible that there was some reference to the Roman site in the positioning of this church, no Roman materials have been reused in the structure itself. The architectural evidence suggests an Anglo-Saxon manorial *burh* on the site of the present church, perhaps within an earlier earthwork: the tower of Burwell church may have been constructed in the 11th or 12th centuries, and that the present church is a later addition (A P Baggs, pers comm).

'An ancient church of unknown date [my emphasis] was known to have stood against the site of a 7th century Christian cemetery' of about 150 graves a short distance to the northeast of the present parish church (Lethbridge 1931, 48). Although this evidence may suggest a multiple church religious complex, it is more likely to reflect a shift in worship from one site in the settlement to another (Woudhuysen 1997, 9–10).

Finally, Burwell's proximity to Soham also argues against its identification as a minster. It seems unlikely that minsters would have been constructed in neighbouring parishes.

16. Ickleton

Ickleton is an unusual church whose architecture has puzzled scholars for many years. It is included here for five reasons, none of which is very conclusive: first, it is cruciform; second, part of its fabric may be late Anglo-Saxon (CCC SMR); third, it was part of an unusually large manor of nearly 20 hides in 1086; fourth, a large part of the demesne of this manor was granted to Ickleton Priory, possibly suggesting a degree of continuity; and fifth, the parish was originally part of the *territorium* around the Roman town at Great Chesterford (Bassett 1989), to which Ickleton stands in the same geographic relation in the northwest as Hadstock does in the northeast.

17. Finally, there are two relatively unusual dedications in south Cambridgeshire which have resulted in the inclusion of the following two sites as potential late Anglo-Saxon estate minsters. There is no other evidence to support their inclusion in such a list, and

they are presented here only for the sake of completeness and are more likely to be manorial churches of the same period.

18. Boxworth

Although the parish church is dedicated to St Peter, a late Anglo-Saxon list of saints' resting places mentions that St Inicius lay at Boxworth, where presumably there was a shrine to the saint (RCHM(E) 1968, 28; Rollason 1978, 71). A late Anglo-Saxon window fragment is built into the wall of the church. Since it is unlikely that a small manorial church would provide focus for pilgrimage, and since there is no other evidence for minster status, this evidence simply suggests that a church had been built at Boxworth by the late 11th century, and that St Inicius' shrine was elsewhere.

19. Histon

One of the two churches at Histon was dedicated to St Etheldreda. Although this church belonged to the manor of the Abbey of Ely, so too did many other Cambridgeshire churches which were not dedicated to St Etheldreda.

Endnotes

1. Priests are mentioned at Abington, Babraham, Bourn, Chesterton, Harston, Haslingfield, Kennett, Oakington, Pampisford, Papworth, Tadlow and Whaddon.
2. I am grateful to Prof Mary Hesse for bringing this information to my attention.
3. Sawyer has suggested that 'many of the hundreds ... were rearrangements by subdivision or otherwise of earlier territories. Some of these, like their hundredal successors, were named after a prominent natural feature ... and the same name was sometimes used for the vill which functioned as its centre ... other centres were simply called the *tun* of their district', and so '*tun* had a special sense referring to the functions of a royal vill as a local centre' (Sawyer 1983, 282). It is important to note, though, that Sawyer does not include any such places in Cambridgeshire in his gazetteer (Sawyer 1983, 293–299).
 - (a) The first criterion consists of locating place names which themselves suggest a royal connection. In Cambridgeshire this list should probably include :
 - **Kingston** (Sawyer 1983, 278 n.30 (a))
 - **Conington** (Sawyer 1983, 278 n.30 (c))
 - (b) Another indication of royal -*tuns* is their duty to supply ancient renders of grain (Sawyer 1983, 212). The royal manors in Cambridgeshire which conformed to this duty in 1086 were
 - **Soham, Fordham and Isleham** (Rumble 1981, 1:1–3)
 - **Cheveley** (Rumble 1981, 1:4)
 - **Wilbraham** (Rumble 1981, 1:5)
 - **Haslingfield** (Rumble 1981, 1:7) Wetherley and Longstowe Hundreds are probably subdivisions of a larger unit; since Wetherley is also considered likely to have part of Armingford Hundred, the pre-Danish minster serving this *regio* is likely to have been at Meldreth.
 - **Chesterton** (Rumble 1981, 1:9)
 - (c) The third criterion for identifying these early central places is a place name which combines an area — or regional — name prefix with a -*tun* suffix. In

- Cambridgeshire the only example is :
- **Arrington** (Reaney 1943, 70)
4. There is now some uncertainty about whether Brandon is a religious or a secular site.
 5. In just 12 places Domesday Book (or occasionally the ICC) notes that a tenant is a priest, implying the existence of a church in that parish by 1086. However, Blair's comment that 'churches served from minsters, and thus lacking priests of their own, may be ignored more often in areas where Domesday Book states that 'est ibi presbiter' rather than 'est ibi ecclesia' is not very helpful in Cambridgeshire (Blair 1987, 275). The Cambridgeshire Domesday refers to the priest/church only in the context of the land which he/it owns and makes use of neither formula. Instead a typical formula is '*Hanc terra tenuit Alric presbiter sub Edeva*' or (at Taversham, the only case of a recorded church), '*Cum hac hida jacet una aecclesia illi uillae*' (Rumble 1981, 14:16, 35:2).
 6. The -worth element of Papworth place may indicate a specialised enclosure on a multiple estate, perhaps for cattle. The heavy clays of Papworth fit well with Costen's suggestion that 'worths' as parish names occur on higher, often difficult ground (Costen 1992, 72–81). Neighbouring Elsworth, with its daughter Knapwell, was a cattle farm for the Abbots of Ramsey in the 10th century (VCH 9, 334).

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