
Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

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for 2006



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Editor Alison Taylor

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Reviews

Anne Holton-Krayenbuhl, Tony Kirby, Alison Taylor

English Episcopal Acta 31, Ely 1109–1197

Nicholas Karn 2005

Oxford University Press (published for the British Academy), cxlix + 288 pp, £47.50

The 12th century was a formative period in the development of medieval Ely. A Benedictine abbey had been founded there c.970, a successor to St Etheldreda's foundation of c.673. By the time of the Norman Conquest, the abbey had acquired an extensive estate that fell under the control of the bishop of Ely following the establishment of the see in 1109; the abbey became a cathedral priory. The 12th century saw the early stages in the division of former abbey holdings between bishop and priory; documents recording this process are among those presented in this volume.

This edition of episcopal *acta*, or records of transactions and decrees, has an extensive introduction. This provides the background to the main part of the volume that consists of an edition of the documents produced in Latin by the 12th-century bishops' administrations. Five appendices conclude the volume.

In the introduction, Karn presents some of the reasons for the creation of the see of Ely, among the smallest in medieval England, and outlines the organisation of the diocese in the 12th century. This is followed by biographies of Hervey, Nigel, Geoffrey Ridel and William de Longchamp, the four bishops whose *acta* are the subject of this volume. All four bishops were involved in affairs of state and spent much of their time travelling around England and abroad; a summary of their movements is presented in Appendix I. The introduction continues with a section on the monks and the bishops, discussing the chronology of grants made to the monks in the decades following establishment of the see; there is an editorial oversight in the introductory paragraph (p. xc) where the author incorrectly states that St Etheldreda's monastery had been founded in the 6th century. The bishops' households are then described, much of the evidence deriving from witness lists. In the final part of the introduction, Karn explains his criteria for inclusion of documents; *acta* concerned with the bishops' secular and ecclesiastical administrations are included, as are those of

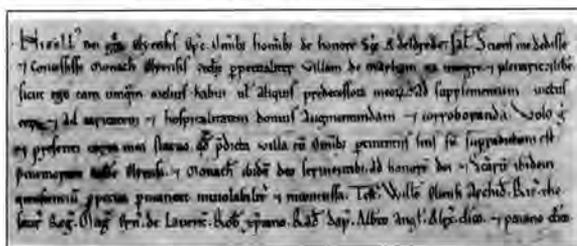
Bishops Nigel and William that illustrate the secular office of these bishops. The form of the documents is then analysed.

The edited *acta* comprise some 176 entries of which 147 are extant texts. These include later medieval copies of 12th-century originals. The remainder are quotations from other documents. The *acta* are grouped into four chapters, one for each bishop. Although the documents are in Latin, a summary of contents in English makes these accessible to the non-Latinist (but note an error of translation in no. 46 where *ad opus fratrum infirmorum* means 'for the use of infirm brethren', not 'for the work of...'). The edited text is followed by a commentary in English.

A large proportion of the *acta* is concerned with the priory at Ely, and the process of division of the former abbey estate between the monks and the bishops may be followed. Bishop Nigel's grant of named vill on the Isle of Ely and beyond, and of specified dues (no.



31), formed the basis of the medieval priory's estate; a similar grant attributed to Bishop Hervey (no. 6) is discussed and considered to be a forgery. Most *acta* contain single grants, often for a specific purpose. A few documents deal with holdings in Ely, including a reference to clearing the land around St Etheldreda's church to reduce the risk of fire (no. 65). Other *acta* deal with the religious houses at Thorney, Ramsey and further afield; there are also grants to named individuals or institutions. Among miscellaneous other topics is a letter of Bishop Nigel addressed to Henry II regarding the number of knights' fees on the estates of the bishop of Ely (no. 59).



Acta No. 40 of Bishop Nigel, from English Episcopal Acta 31, Ely 1109–1197.

Karn's edition of the episcopal *acta* for Ely is a valuable contribution to the study of medieval Ely, it also provides an illustration of 12th-century episcopal administration. This compilation of manuscripts drawn from a wide range of sources will be of use to those requiring an edition of the original texts. The non-specialist will find this a useful reference book. The text is clearly written; the introduction and the comments on the *acta* provide much new information on this significant period in the development of medieval Ely.

Anne Holton-Krayenbuhl

Cambridge and its Economic Region 1450–1560

John S Lee 2006

University of Hertfordshire Press, 256pp, £35.00 hardback, £18.99 paperback

What is the 'Cambridge region'? Today, a wide range of indicators, as diverse as travel-to-work/study/shop patterns, the circulation area of the *Cambridge Evening News* and the geographical distribution of the hardy band of Cambridge United supporters are easily available to economists and planners to illustrate the influence of the city on its hinterland, although each would undoubtedly show a somewhat different pattern. For historians and historical geographers the task is less easy. HC Darby and JA Steers, editing the two comprehensive British Association surveys of 1938 and 1965 respectively, got round the problem by ignoring it and giving their contributors freedom to define the 'region' as they wished. The one thing that is clear is that the impact of Cambridge on its county and beyond has varied over time and that the

'Cambridge region' of 2006 is very different to that of (say) 1806 or 1606.

Dr Lee's work is an attempt at definition of the region in the 15th and 16th centuries, although his study extends chronologically well beyond these dates in both directions. He skilfully deploys an impressive range of national and local primary and secondary sources and his bibliography alone is a valuable contribution to regional studies. The reviewer's favourite ploy of 'spot the missing items' drew only one major blank: Donovan Purcell's *Cambridge Stone*, a surprising omission, perhaps, in view of the importance building materials play in his study.

This is a multi-layered book, but three themes dominate. The first, implicit in the title, is Cambridge's relationship with the world beyond its own boundaries, which through college accounts (Corpus, King's, St John's and Trinity are the most used) can be traced with a degree of certainty impossible for most other late medieval towns. As might be expected, Lynn and London were the town's most important trading partners, but there were links with many others, including Norwich, Salisbury and Winchester. Local commercial relations with places such as Cherry Hinton, Foxton and Whittlesford are also explored, although the suggestion in Chapter 1 that even relatively small towns like Cambridge could be important agents of change in the 'modernisation' of the countryside remains unproven (and probably unprovable, at least before the 18th century). What emerges is confirmation that rural Cambridgeshire was a relatively poor county (ranking 21 out of 33 nationally in 1515), but that this masked, then as now, major sub-regional differences: the river valleys south of the town prosperous, the western clay plateau and parts of the Fens less so.

The second theme is the late medieval 'urban crisis' long familiar to historians. There is general agreement that the 15th century did indeed mark a nadir in the fortunes of most English towns: but when did recovery start and how strong and sustained was it? The Cambridge evidence is far from clear-cut, and complicated both by the growing importance of the University and the Corporation's habit of pleading poverty throughout the 16th century whenever faced with new financial demands from central government. Nonetheless the lack of manufactures (47% of the occupied population were in service-based industries in the 16th century) seems to have helped the town avoid the depression that affected its neighbours in Suffolk, Essex and Norfolk and its attraction to immigrants, especially in skilled trades such as leather-working and building, would suggest a degree of dynamism throughout the period.

The third theme is the rise of the University. Emerging from the medieval hostels, the colleges (of which six were new in this period) gave the town an unusual economic profile: effectively, it contained the equivalent of several great aristocratic, ecclesiastical and gentry households. They varied greatly in wealth: King's had an annual net income of £1011 p.a. in 1546, Magdalene £44. Corpus, St John's and Jesus had extensive town property holdings, Magdalene none.