

PETERBOROUGH MONASTERY AND ITS *CHRONICLE*: ANNALISTIC HISTORY
AS AN EXPRESSION OF INDEPENDENT IDENTITY

by

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(Under the Direction of JONATHAN EVANS)

ABSTRACT

The fenlands of East Anglia are rife with superstition and folklore and are home to a highly independent culture of people. The character and qualities of these fen-dwellers have been shaped by a number of forces, including the Danish invasions and settlements that began in Anglo-Saxon England in the eighth century and lasted through the tenth. These invasions particularly affected the northeastern portions of England, redefining the region's cultural and political structures and setting it apart from the rest of Britain. The monastery of Peterborough, located on the southern edge of this region, produced, among others, records that demonstrate this cultivated independence. One such record is a localized annalistic history, based on a national parent version, that extends from 1 A.D. to 1154 A.D., called the *Peterborough Chronicle*.

INDEX WORDS: Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Peterborough, Monastery, Abbey, Danelaw,
Anglo-Saxon England, Fenlands, Folklore, Legend, Wild Hunt, Hereward

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.....	10
Prehistoric Settlement.....	10
The Romans.....	11
The Anglo-Saxons.....	12
The Church.....	13
Viking Invasions and Settlement.....	14
Danish Influence as a Primary Force in Shaping the Character of the Danelaw and that of Peterborough	17
History as a Uniting Force: A Coalescing of English National Identity	19
3 THE FOUNDING OF MEDESHAMSTEDE ABBEY, ITS FIRST DESTRUCTION, AND ITS FIRST REBUILDING	26
The First Destruction of Medeshamstede.....	43
Reestablishing and Renaming of the Monastery	46
4 THE SECOND DESTRUCTION AND REBUILDING, AND PETERBOROUGH'S SUBSEQUENT HISTORY TO THE PRESENT DAY.....	56
The Second Destruction of the Monastery	56
An Unwanted Abbot: Henry of Poitou.....	64

End of the Peterborough Chronicle	67
Peterborough in the Late Medieval Era.....	68
Modern Peterborough.....	69
NOTES.....	71
WORKS CITED	74
WORKS CONSULTED	77

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My thoughts had been busy. Who in Stamford might know me? None but Hasling and his housekeeper, and not even they knew where lay my home. Not many people traveled so there was a goodly chance none of those who had witnessed my deed had seen me before, or my village. Yet if such there was, once I reached the fens I was lost to them.

For the fens were a vast area of low-lying ground, of shallow lakes and winding waterways, impassable swamps with here and there limestone outcroppings that created small islands, often with clumps of birch or ancient oaks.

From a distance the fens were deceptively flat and uninteresting, but once down in the winding waterways, they proved anything but that. For there were clumps of willow and alder, or tall reeds that permitted boats to move about almost unseen. The scattered islands in the vastness of the fens were mostly secret, a knowledge reserved for fen-men alone, places of refuge in times of trouble. Most of the waterways were hidden by reeds up to ten feet tall.

Bog myrtle, bladderwort, marsh fern, saw sedge and dozens of varieties of plants and shrubs grew there, and we of the fens knew them all. It was there the Icenis had gone to escape the attacks of northern sea-rovers who invaded the land by sailing up the Ouse or the Cam.

Our fens were sparsely inhabited by a clannish lot who cared not for outsiders coming to our watery world.

Thus are the fens of East Anglia seen through the eyes of Barnabas Sackett, a fen-dweller and the entrepreneurial protagonist of Louis L'Amour's novel *Sackett's Land* (11-12). Though perhaps not as immediately recognizable as a geographic or cultural icon of England as would

most likely be, for example, the cliffs of Dover, Stonehenge, Hadrian's Wall, and Stratford-on-Avon, the fenlands of England are just as culturally important as these more well-known landmarks and places. The fens – low, marshy land of the kind found in the Wash of East Anglia's coastal areas – are the setting for legends and tales, folklore and the supernatural, and are cultural symbols of the same type as forests and swamps – mysterious and fertile places from which come darkness, evil, the undefined, the frightening, the spooky, and the unknown.

Literature of many different eras is peppered with the motifs of mysterious forests and swamps. In "Hansel and Gretel," by the Brothers Grimm, the woods are home to a witch who eats children. Young Goodman Brown, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story of the same name, ventures into the woods one evening for a meeting with the devil. What he finds deep within – many prominent fellow townspeople involved in a satanic ceremony – sucks away his faith and belief in good, leaving him caustic, cynical, bitter, and suspicious for the remainder of his life. The forest and swamp appear frequently in modern film as portents of evil or as mysterious, spirit-testing settings. Dorothy's companions in *The Wizard of Oz* must pass through the haunted forest before they are able to rescue her from the Wicked Witch. Cult and camp classics like *Swamp Thing* and *The Legend of Boggy Creek* (and their sequels) cater to a taste for the mysterious creatures that reputedly inhabit the swamps and terrorize those around them.

It is not just modern literature and film, however, that recognize the emotional and cultural importance of these symbols and motifs. Chrétien de Troyes, in *Le Conte du Graal*, sets his opening scene in the forest, and although it is alive with spring, blooming trees, and chattering birds, it is also home to mysterious forces. Perceval, through whom the reader sees this forest, lives there with his mother, "a la veve dame / De la gaste forest soutaine" [*"the widowed lady of the lone and wild forest"*] (ll.72-73; Cline ll.75-76). Just after leaving home on

his quest he hears a crashing in the woods and assumes it is the evil against which his mother advises he cross himself (though he declares he would rather fight than pray against it). In Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval*, Lanval, slighted in the distribution of wives and lands, withdraws to the forest to bemoan his state. There he is approached by several handmaidens, who take him to their mistresses's tent. This mysterious woman in the forest becomes Lanval's source for wealth and love, though he must undergo a test of character before he is allowed to remain with her.

Even earlier in Western literature, the Beowulf poet locates Grendel's home in "þe mōras [...], fen ond fæsten" [*the moors, fen and fastness*], where Grendel, as one of Cain's offspring, has been banished (Klaeber ll.103b-104a; Donaldson 26)¹. This region is forboding and threatening, the "fifelcynnes eard" [*home of the monster's race*] (Klaeber l.104b; Donaldson 26) inhabited by all manner of creatures – "eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas" [*trolls and elves and monsters*] (Klaeber l.112; Donaldson 27) – descended from Cain, whom God had condemned. Grendel is an outcast, a "grimma gæst," "mære mearcstapa," and "wonsæli wer" who held the moors [*grim spirit; rover of the borders; unhappy creature*] (Klaeber 102a, 103a, 105a; Donaldson 26). There is a second mention of this forbidding habitat, steeped in evil, included after Beowulf is told of Grendel's mother's attack on Heorot:

Ic þæt londbūend, lēode mīne,
selerædende secgan hȳrde,
þæt hīe gesāwon swylce twēgen
micle mearcstapan mōras healdan,
ellorgæstas. [...]

Hīe dȳgel lond
warigeað wulfhleoþu, windige næssas,

frēcne fengelād, ðær fyrgenstrēam
 under næssa genipu niþer gewīteð,
 flōd under foldan. Nis þæt feor heonon
 mīlgemearces, þæt se mere standeð;
 ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas,
 wudu wyrtum fæst wæter oferhelmað.
 Ðær mæg nihta gehwām nīðwundor sēon,
 fȳr on flōde (Klaeber ll. 1345-49; 1357b-1366a).

*[I have heard landmen, my people, hall-counselors, say this, that they have seen two such huge walkers in the wasteland holding to the moor, alien spirits [...]
 They hold to the secret land, the wolf-slopes, the windy headlands, the dangerous fen-paths where the mountain stream goes down under the darkness of the hills, the flood under the earth. It is not far from here, measured in miles, that the mere stands; over it hang frost-covered woods, trees fast of root close over the water.
 There each night may be seen fire on the flood, a fearful wonder (Donaldson 45)].*

In these lines, the poet evokes the dark, supernatural, and terrifying character of this landscape, filled with “dȳgel lond,” “wulfhleoþu,” “windige næssas,” and “frēcne fengelād [“secret land,” “wolf-slopes,” “windy headlands,” and “dangerous fen-paths”]” (Klaeber ll.1357b-1359a; Donaldson 45), and where fire burns preternaturally on water.

Not only fiction and poetry but also historical prose acknowledges the cultural significance of these settings and the qualities attached to them. Bede recognizes the isolated, fecund character of the fens, making references in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* particularly to the country surrounding the fenland monastery of Ely, saying

Est autem Elge in provincia Orientalium Anglorum regio familiarum circiter sexcentarum, in similitudinem insulae, vel paludibus, ut diximus, circumdata, vel aquis: unde et a copia anguillarum quae in iisdem paludibus capiuntur, nomen accepit (2: 110).

[Now the country of Ely is in the province of the East English, and containeth about 600 hides of land, and is compassed, as we said, like an island round about with either fens or water: wherefore too it hath had its name from the great store of eels which are plentifully taken in the same fens (2: 111)].

There comes a slightly earlier reference to the fens around Ely as well: “ipsa enim regio Elge undique est aquis ac paludibus circumdata, neque lapides maiores habet” (2: 106) [*“for this same country of Elge [Ely] is roundabout compassed with waters and fens nor hath stones of larger size” (2: 107)*]. Richard Muir comments that “in medieval times, the Fen was neither a wilderness nor a place where a stranger could often feel at home [...] the setting held mysteries and challenges for outsiders” and was “remote and rather inaccessible” (185-186).

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* also has a number of references to the mysterious fens, not the least of which is the story of Hereward, folk hero and fen legend. Further discussion of Hereward may be found in chapter 4. Hereward’s story survives in a number of manuscripts.² He was a tenant of lands held by two fen monasteries, Peterborough and Crowland. Rebelling against Norman control following William the Conqueror’s victory in 1066, Hereward and his supporters attacked from and retreated to the fens, which provided both habitat and hideout. They pilfered the treasures of Peterborough Abbey, which was about to be taken over by a Norman abbot, and took them to Ely, a nearby monastery not under Norman control. Hereward and a number of his followers were never captured by William, and “it was Hereward’s fate to

join that select company of national heroes whose memory is preserved more vividly in legendary sources than in the pages of the history books. Tales of his stubborn but forlorn resistance to the Conqueror captured the imagination of the Anglo-Norman chroniclers, and an extensive folklore literature was circulating within a few decades of his death” (Hart, *Danelaw* 625). Minor fen heroes who were also part of this movement include Turkil of Harrington and Siward of Maldon, both large landholders and supporters of Hereward (636-647).

Fenland folklore is quite extensive; one noteworthy medieval legend mentioned specifically in the *Peterborough Chronicle* is that of the Wild Hunt, in which dark spectral huntsmen on black, swarthy horses and goats ride terrifyingly through the woods during the night, sounding their horns, accompanied by their devilish hounds. Thomas Sternberg in *The Dialect and Folklore of Northamptonshire* comments that even today “the hell-hounds, and their ghostly hunstman, are still heard careering along the gloomy avenues of Whittlebury”; additionally, “the goblin hunstman and his train, the ‘wütend heer’ of the German peasantry, are known [to Northamptonshire residents] by the name of the ‘wild-men,’ ‘wild-hounds’ [...] and the wild whoop with which he cheers his hounds is still said to be heard” (131; 142). Sternberg notes that the appearance of the spectral huntsman and his hounds “is generally regarded as ominous of evil, often death” (144). The Wild Hunt appears in the *Chronicle* in conjunction with the arrival of a new abbot, Henry of Poitou, to Peterborough in 1127, signifying Henry’s perceived maleficence.

Though a monastery like Peterborough, situated on the edge of the unapproachable fens, may not seem remarkable, nor knowledge of it useful, Peterborough has a more important place in history than is often credited to it. It was at Peterborough that “the very first step in a process which was to transform the face of England, impressing upon it the stamp of Norman rule,” was

undertaken by William the Conqueror (Hart, *Danelaw* 647). It was these fens that so successfully concealed Hereward and his followers after they rebelled against the coming Norman rule of England, of their fenland monasteries, and of their lands. It was Peterborough's unique geographic place, situated in the outer Danelaw, and its people, staunchly independent fen-dwellers, that kept the region from fully unifying with the Anglo-Saxon government; it remained instead an independent political entity even into the twentieth century. Peterborough, both as a secular and as a religious establishment, has had special significance from its founding.

Medeshamstede was the first monastery in all of Mercia (Mackreth 14) and Peterborough, rebuilt after Medeshamstede's destruction, became one of the wealthiest monasteries and had one of the wealthiest cathedrals in Northamptonshire, important enough for a town to grow up around it.

Peterborough survives today as a living extension of its important past, but its former inhabitants have also left written relics, one of which is an annalistic history stretching from 1 A.D. to 1154 A.D., known as the *Peterborough Chronicle* (MS Laud Misc. 636 at the Bodleian³; referred to as *E*).

The *Peterborough Chronicle* has as its ancestor the *Alfredian Chronicle (asterisked because, as there are no extant copies, its existence is conjectural), which was "composed, probably in Wessex in the court of King Alfred the Great, on the basis of a variety of historical and semi-historical materials including Easter tables, northern annals, regnal lists, genealogies, oral tradition, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and an unidentified work of universal history" (Evans 58). A transcript of this Chronicle, likely made at Winchester, was taken to the North, becoming the "*Northern Recension, which is the ancestor of the text surviving in the *Peterborough Chronicle*" (59). A copy of this recension was taken south again, "in 1031, to St. Augustine's, Canterbury," where it remained

until either it or a copy of it was taken to Peterborough in 1121, where it served as the exemplar for Bodleian MS Laud 636 [... and] was probably written in order to replace an earlier version of the *Northern Recension destroyed by fire at the monastery in August 1116 [...] In addition to copying his exemplar, the twelfth-century Peterborough scribe inserted passages throughout all layers of the work (59).

These inserted passages offer more detailed histories of local Peterborough events, particularly those regarding the founding, successive endowments, and multiple rebuildings of the monastery. These Peterborough insertions use certain phrasings and terms and relate particular events that are intended to assert and provide documentary evidence (though often spurious or manufactured) of the monastery's independence from its foundation.

Additionally, while *E* is historically and philologically important, its language is not as authentically Old English as that of other manuscripts of the same era; nevertheless, it remains a document central to understanding Peterborough's history. One can illuminate the local scribes' interpretations of historic events (put euphemistically) or, put another way, their embellishments or even possibly fictionalizations of history (e.g., Æthelwold's 963 discovery of charters in the walls of a reputedly burnt-out shell of a monastery) by viewing *E* in the context of Peterborough's cultural history. In establishing its history through the *Chronicle*, the scribes also establish the independent pedigree of the monastery. An examination of the area's history before the founding of the monastery, from Northamptonshire's earliest inhabitants and Roman occupation to the advent of the Anglo-Saxons, provides further understanding of Peterborough's history. A voluminous amount of scholarship precedes this endeavor; there are any number of authoritative and comprehensive histories of Peterborough and of the *Peterborough Chronicle*

already in existence.⁴ Though the inquiries here will in many ways echo those of previous scholars, I attempt to present the unique history of Peterborough as a way of contextualizing the version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* produced in this staunchly independent region. Localized Peterborough insertions added to the original source manuscript offer important insights into the concerns and events of this region as well as its place in national history.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric Settlement

The landscape of Northamptonshire has changed dramatically over time. The poor living conditions of its early days kept the number of inhabitants low, but despite evidence that indicates “arctic tundra-like conditions with an average annual temperature below 0°C,” artifacts recovered from various sites in Northamptonshire, including “the valleys of the Nene, the Tove and the fen round Peterborough” (Steane 30-31), reveal that Paleolithic dwellers, living from two million B.C. to around 13,000 B.C., did inhabit the area, though they were not great in number (Collins).

Evidence of later Neolithic settlements, from a period of roughly 6,000 B.C. to 3,000 B.C. (Collins), is still scarce “apart from a scatter of flints of varying types in Upton parish near Northampton and the considerable remains in the Nene gravels of Peterborough” (Steane 31). The first wave of Continental settlers entered Britain in the third millennium B.C., and the “first major evidence of settlement of Neolithic farmers in the county is at Fengate, Peterborough” (Greenall 17). This site reveals not only evidence of an early Neolithic settlement but also evidence of a larger and later one, very prosperous, due perhaps in part to its proximity to the trade routes along the “Jurassic Way” (17), an “important prehistoric routeway” that passes perhaps ten miles or less to the west of Peterborough (Steane 35-7) and “provided wider contacts with the south-west and north-east” (40). This settlement developed its own style of pottery and the site contains pottery fragments of the “earliest Bronze Age migrants,” dating from roughly 2100 to 1800 B.C.

At some point the climate shifted and became more hospitable to living, as evidenced by an excavation of the Earls Barton barrow on the Nene flood plain, where archaeologists have discovered a radically different soil from that existing on the plain around it. The “fine loam soil” found in the barrow suggests that “the natural ecology of the Nene valley in the early Bronze Age [1500-1000 B.C. (Collins)] [...] was fertile, well drained and therefore attractive to early farmers” (Steane 33).

In fact, the Nene River has attracted settlers for thousands of years. The areas along the river valley “provided ideal settlement sites” and “have been continuously occupied and farmed since Neolithic times.” Even more importantly, perhaps, is that “the [river] valley was for long a main channel of communication and the occasional bridging points were magnets for urban trade at Peterborough, Oundle, Wellingborough and Northampton from the early Middle Ages onward.” Even in much earlier times, river access was necessary for communication, trade, and socialization (28).

The Romans

When the Romans arrived in Northamptonshire in the first century A.D., they imposed towns and fortresses on a fairly rural landscape (44); in fact, they established one of these fortresses just across the Nene from the modern site of Peterborough and not too far from the Neolithic settlement at Fengate. They called it Durobrivae, and it “became a thriving market town, the centre of an important part of Roman Britain” (Greenall 20). In fact, “no other part of Roman Northamptonshire seems to have been as densely peopled as Durobrivae and its district” (20). Peter Mackreth notes additionally that its size and “the number of villas in its neighborhood” reflect “the wealth of the area in earlier times” (1).

The Anglo-Saxons

Though the Roman occupation was certainly an important part of British history, John Steane cautions his readers not to place too much emphasis on the Romans' presence, saying that it is possible historians and archaeologists have somewhat "exaggerated the effects of the period of four centuries of peace which the Romans imposed on the Celtic tribes" because of their relief at finally dealing with "tangible structural remains" and "a literate culture." In fact, he goes on to say "it is clear that Roman influence on rural areas was greatly delayed and even by the third century A.D. only skin deep" (40). To emphasize this point, Steane notes that in the early sixth century, just after the Romans' retreat, "Northamptonshire was still for the most part a wilderness of forest, marsh and fen." Subsequent settlers in the area were Anglo-Saxon migrants and invaders, who Steane compares to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British colonizers in North America (54).

The Anglo-Saxons appear to have settled in the East Midlands from the fifth century onwards. The archaeology "points to an intensive and very early settlement along the middle course of the river Nene and its tributaries" (55), not surprising given the long history of settlement on the river banks. A "secondary phase" of settlement took these Anglo-Saxons to previously uninhabited areas like the fens and the eastern forest lands of the Peterborough area. This phase "had progressed considerably before the arrival of the Danes in the ninth century" (59), and despite the ten or more years of civil war in Britain, the Peterborough area appears to have been prosperous, one source of evidence being a Christian treasure found at Water Newton (the Roman Durobrivae) that was probably buried "during the collapse of 442, or possibly earlier, during the Diocletian persecution," in the mid-third to early-fourth century (Greenall 21). Steane notes that "it may well have been the influence of the monastery at Medeshamstede,

endowed with immense stretches of fen and swamp in the seventh century, that led to the foundation of these secondary settlements” (Steane 59-60).

The Church

In his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede notes that it was 596 in which “Gregorius papa misit Britanniam Augustinum cum monachis, qui verbum Dei genti Anglorum evangelizarent” [*Gregory sent Augustine together with certain monks into Britain, to preach the good tidings of the word of God to the English nation*] (2: 376-377). The church grew in size and in number, establishing parishes, churches, and monasteries throughout Anglo-Saxon England. Archbishop Theodore further solidified the church’s organization in Britain in the mid- to late-seventh century (Blair 80). In his essay “The Anglo-Saxon Period,” John Blair furthers the idea that successive settlements of an area were often established in the same spots, noting that English churches were frequently founded in locations historically favored by inhabitants:

also with the first English churches, we start to glimpse the first English towns. Possibly sixth-century rulers had set up headquarters in the Roman towns and forts; certainly seventh- and eighth-century rulers favoured them as sites for cathedrals and minsters. Canterbury, York, Winchester, and Worcester cathedrals were all built within Roman defences, and in 635 the first bishop of Wessex was given the Roman fort at Dorchester-on-Thames, called by Bede a *civitas*, to found his see [...] At Northampton, recent excavations have shown that the nucleus of the town was an eighth-century minster church and hall, with associated buildings (82-83).

Under the Mercian kings

some important institutions did start to take shape [...] The Church was now firmly established with lands and privileges. Its assemblies were solemn affairs, recorded in writing. Æthelbald and Offa were involved in Church councils and sometimes presided over them; their thegns and ministers witnessed decisions. The way Church business was conducted can hardly have failed to heighten the sense of precedent and legality. Though the context is ecclesiastical, such assemblies must have helped to transform the *ad hoc* band of warriors around a seventh-century king into the formal ‘Witan’ or grand council which we find in late Saxon England (Blair 85-86).

Viking Invasions and Settlement

Britain’s history is strongly shaped by the invasions of the Vikings (made up of both Norse and Danish folk), especially between the eighth and the tenth centuries. The Vikings began minor invasions of England in the eighth century and, in bursts of intense activity, continued to be a hostile and invasive presence for roughly the next two centuries. The *Chronicle*’s first mention of a Viking presence comes in annal 787, with the arrival of three ships from Norway. In 793 there is a record of their first attack, when the Vikings destroyed Lindisfarne. The second series of major Viking invasions, led by Halfdane, came around 866; then, according to the *Chronicle*, this army began settling the area about 876, with Halfdane and his part of the army going to Northumbria to further conquer and settle, leading “to the consolidation of the Viking kingdom of York,” and “the remainder of the Danes under the three kings, Guthrum, Oscetel, and Anwend” campaigning further in Cambridge and against the West

Saxons, then ultimately going to Mercia and creating what would become the area of the Five Boroughs. Parts of this group continued to campaign “against the West Saxons, led by King Alfred” until “a treaty was made at Wedmore in Somerset, and Guthrum was baptised” (Hart, *Danelaw* 7). The treaty split control of England between the Danes and the West Saxons, giving the former the northeastern half and the latter the remainder. East Anglia “was settled by a section of the Danish army of King Guthrum following the Battle of Edington and the ensuing Treaty of Wedmore in 878” (Evans 95). Although this boundary was pushed even further westward by the Danes, “there is also place-name evidence of Danish settlement to the west of Watling Street, in the south-west of what became Northamptonshire” (Hart, *Danelaw* 7).

Northamptonshire is considered part of the “Outer Danelaw” and part of “the territory settled by a section of the Danish army of King Guthrum”; these settled territories became “in effect East Anglian satellites, each being ruled by its own earl, seated in or near the parent borough.” The settlers established these four boroughs (Bedford, Huntingdon, Cambridge, and Northampton) along the lines of “pre-existing Mercian centres at important river crossings from which one could control the local communications by land and water. The Danes appear to have enlarged them and strengthened their defences” (10). Northamptonshire (and especially its northern areas, including Peterborough), though an “outer” territory, “from an early period after the Danish settlement [...] leaned in its affinities towards the Five Boroughs [Leicester, Derby, Lincoln, Nottingham, and Stamford] lying north of the River Welland,” the area just to the north of the Outer Danelaw, under direct Danish control and influence; each of the Five Boroughs became a headquarters of a part of the Danish army (11).

The relative peace that followed the Treaty of Wedmore did not last for long. Bent on recapturing the Danelaw, King Edward the Elder led the West Saxons and his sister Lady

Æthelflæd led the Mercians in a “long campaign [...] which was undertaken from 910 onwards.” When Edward captured Huntingdon, its inhabitants as well as “the Danish army of Cambridge which had once been led by Earl Sihtric” surrendered to him. This surrender is described in the *Liber Eliensis* as a very wise decision: “only those Danes who submitted to King Edward in person were allowed to keep their land.” By about 920, Edward had regained control of the Five Boroughs as well as the northern Danelaw areas of York, Bamburgh, and Scotland (Hart, *Danelaw* 14-19). This control, however, was not unchallenged:

for a quarter of a century after the territory of the Five Boroughs became subject to the overlordship of the English crown, the Viking kings of York with various allies sought in a number of campaigns to bring the area under their own suzerainty [...] Olaf Gothfrithsson, king of York and Dublin, suffered an annihilating defeat at *Brunanburh*⁵ [...] undeterred, Olaf tried again in 940, this time with considerable (but temporary) success; all the lands of the English from Watling Street northwards to Dunbar fell into his hands. English power was restored by King Edmund just two years later (19).

Though the area was once again firmly under English control – as Hart says, “from this time onwards English overlordship of the Five Boroughs was not seriously challenged during the rest of the tenth century” – that control did not eradicate or even much affect the Danish influence on the changing character of the region; indeed, “the local autonomy enjoyed by this region continued to play an important part in English history” (19-20). Even with the establishment of English law and rule in the Danelaw, Danish customs are retained. One such example is found in the Wantage Code, “drawn up by the counsellors of King Æthelred the Unready for the governance of the territory of the Five Boroughs [which] appears to date from the early years of

his reign [and] impresses the stamp of a central royal authority on local customs and administration of Danish origin”; though it imposes English royal rule on this Danish area, the code “is important for its preservation of some details of Danish customary law” (Hart, *Danelaw* 20).

Danish Influence as a Primary Force in Shaping the Character of the Danelaw and that of Peterborough

John Blair sketches a dismal image of the results of years of Danish invasion: “three kingdoms destroyed, dioceses disrupted, innumerable monasteries plundered, charters and other documents almost completely lost for much of eastern England. The ruin of monasteries was perhaps the most serious, for the great houses had been the main repositories of learning and culture” (96). Despite these losses, the Danish infiltration of Britain brought about a unique cultural amalgamation that is especially evident in the Danelaw, though parts of it (particularly political structures) seeped into other areas of England. This cultural blend is one feature that kept Peterborough unique, often standing apart from the rest of England and resisting the crown’s uniting efforts even into the twentieth century. Blair notes that “even when the Danelaw was Christianized and brought under English rule it retained striking peculiarities, with its own systems of manorial organization, land measurement, law, and social differentiation” (96).

Indeed, the Danish presence was critical in many ways in shaping the Danelaw area of England and specifically the Peterborough region of Northamptonshire, though Cyril Hart is quick to caution that “the *degree* of Danish influence [...] was itself very variable with time and place” (*Danelaw* 4). Hart goes on to discuss some of the many ways in which Danish influence began to differentiate the Danelaw from the rest of England. He puts it in terms of sudden

changes: “immediately after the settlement, the whole of the Danelaw north of the River Welland and a large part of it to the south of the Welland was totally outside the control of the English crown.” As a result, neither geld, nor “provision of the royal farm,” nor military service was given to the English crown. Additionally,

royal dooms were ignored within the settlement area; there was no written law, and for forty years Danish customary law prevailed unchallenged. Even after the power of the West Saxon royal line had been established throughout the Danelaw by King Edward the Elder and his successors in the first half of the tenth century, its application was strictly limited, and for a long while afterwards much of the Danelaw remained largely autonomous (Hart, *Danelaw* 4).

Because the crown had no power at all in the Danelaw, a markedly different, Danish-infiltrated society was cultivated, influenced by its Danish roots: as “in Viking Denmark royal control over individuals and communities appears to have been much less developed than in England” (4).

Hart offers the following as a characterization of the Danelaw: “the Danelaw may be defined simply as those parts of England in which the customary law observed in the shire and borough courts and in the courts of smaller units of local administration exhibited a strong individuality, arising from the Danish influences which prevailed there.” Hart takes this from “the late Sir Frank Stenton, who would have been the first to warn that modifications are required when applying a general definition of this kind to different periods, and to different areas of Danish-controlled territory” (3).

The Danelaw affected more than just society: it affected local language and all of England, including its literature and culture. Particularly, the *Peterborough Chronicle* is an extant testimony to this; one of the most recent treatises on the matter proposes that “the

Peterborough Chronicle supplies evidence for the introduction and spread of Scandinavian-derived plural pronouns which is as much as a century older than the *Orrmulum*, hitherto the accepted *terminus a quo* for this linguistic development” (Evans 58).

History as a Uniting Force: A Coalescing of English National Identity

To understand the gradual coalescing of the English nation, we must return for a moment to pre-Viking England. John Blair describes early eighth-century England as “a more sophisticated place than it had been in the early seventh. A united English kingdom was still far away, but the English were now starting to become aware of themselves as an ethnic and cultural unity.” He supports this statement by offering Bede as an example: “Bede may have felt this more keenly than anyone: it is easy to forget how significant is the very title of his greatest work, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. It was because he saw the common destiny of his race fulfilled in the united English Church that he could think of an ‘English people’” (83). Perhaps Blair is too grandiose in putting this in the lofty terms of a “common destiny of [Bede’s] race fulfilled,” but Bede’s title does testify to at least an awareness of national identity, however nascent, and possibly a desire for solidifying that identity by encapsulating and recording it in a written document. Bede also indicates an understanding on his part of a national identity by addressing “omnes ad quos haec eadem Historia pervenire poterit nostrae nationis legentes” [“all men unto whom this same History of our nation shall come”] (1: 10-11).

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, undertaken nearly a century after Bede wrote, is intended, at least in part, in a similar vein as Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*. King Alfred’s efforts at rejuvenating a culture of literacy and learning that, according to him, had degenerated markedly were not only to restore scholarly pursuits and lay learning, but they were also perhaps intended

to generate a sense of unity among a people that had been much fragmented during the past century of Viking invasions. Commencing roughly ten years after the Treaty of Wedmore he struck with the Danes in 878, his sponsorship of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* promoted the recording of a common national history that, as evidenced through its long writing process and its various extant results, turned out to be not so common after all. Each location in which it was continued left a mark of some kind on its results. Peterborough was part of the Danelaw, and the annalistic records of the *Peterborough Chronicle* evidence a desire to establish and authenticate the monastery's and the town's independence from the crown and to highlight its rather sensational development and history. Despite Edmund's recovery of much of the Danelaw in the mid tenth-century, the area retained its acquired bi-cultural character. Several decades later, under Edgar's control, the independence of the Danelaw was still informally recognized: "the emphasis is on unity: Edgar's codes make allowance for local custom, especially in the Danelaw, but insist that 'the secular law shall stand in each folk as can best be established'" (Blair 100).

Alfred's sponsorship of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* provided a written history that not only solidified the English nation but also offered a means of developing and legitimizing the English language. Though its various extant versions contain Latin entries (the number in each version varies), the majority of the *Chronicle's* entries are written in English. This English, especially in *E*, is of a type sometimes associated more closely with early Middle English than late Old English, with evidence of "false archaism" and "a very revealing stage" of syntax (Clark lxi; lxxiii). Jonathan Evans, in discussing David Shores' 1970 article "The Peterborough Chronicle: Continuity and Change in the English Language," notes that "the language of the Peterborough manuscript seems to give evidence of both conservatism and a progressivism simultaneously" (72); Shores comments that there are "many features that show marked

developments toward Modern English,” yet perhaps “the presence of the archaic features and constructions” indicates a “‘deliberate archaism’ on the part of the scribes” (29).

As a further clarification of the extent of Danish influence on Peterborough and the *Chronicle*, Cecily Clark remarks that

on the whole, the interpenetration of English and Norse shown by this text is just of that degree which might be expected at Peterborough, which lies well to the west of Watling Street, the boundary of the Danelaw [...] Moreover, the high proportion of *sokemen* among the population of this hundred shows that Scandinavian influence here acted on the social system no less than on nomenclature. On the other hand, [...] the Anglian peasantry must have survived in good numbers, especially in the more southerly regions of the Danelaw (“Studies” 88).

As G. N. Garmonsway discusses in his introduction to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, only two other histories are written in the vernacular in pre-1200 Europe, “the Irish annals and an early Russian chronicle” (xvi). King Alfred in his oft-cited preface to the *Cura Pastoralis* laments the inability of his people to read or write their own native language:

Swæ clæne hīo wæs oðfeallenu on Angelcynne ðæt swīðe fēawa wæron behionan Humbre ðe hiora ðēninga cūðen understondan on Englisc oððe furðum ān ārendgewrit of Lædene on Englisc areccean; ond ic wēne ðætte nōht monige begiondan Humbre nāren (Whitelock 5).

[So complete was [learning’s] decay among the English people that there were very few this side of the Humber who could comprehend their services in English,

or even translate a letter from Latin into English; and I imagine that there were not many beyond the Humber (Swanton 31)].

While a bit hyperbolic, Alfred's statement clearly explains his justification for encouraging the learning of English in a number of ways, including both sponsoring and translating a number of works like Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Gregory the Great's *Cura Pastoralis*, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, St. Augustine's *Soliloquium*, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Alfred's choice of works to translate "is less idiosyncratic than might at first appear"; it is in fact, as Michael Swanton maintains, "dictated by a clear educational rationale." The works were chosen because they "contain both moral and social philosophy, national and world history" (xvii).

Garmonsway suggests that English was used in writing the *Chronicle* "perhaps, it must be confessed, by default, because of the decay of Latin studies, and the almost complete disappearance of spoken Latin in this country in the ninth century when the first compilation of the *Chronicle* was made" (xvi). But it would seem that, while Alfred laments the disintegration of Latin scholarship, he does not advocate the use of English because Latin is harder to learn or harder to bring back. He does ascribe the decay of the use and understanding of Latin to a certain "reccelēase" [*careless*] attitude of the people, and bemoans the fact that because of it learning fell into such complete decay, but he is able to see the value of preparing and offering important texts in English (Whitelock 6; Swanton 31). Despite his regret that "sīo lār Lædengeðīodes ær ðissum āfeallen wæs giond Angelcynn, ond ðēah monige cūðon Englisc gewrit ārædan" [*the knowledge of Latin had previously decayed throughout the English people, and yet many could read English writing*] (Whitelock 7; Swanton 32), he finds value in the quotidian and perhaps more practical application of scholarship – lay literacy in lay language in order to read religious

texts and the like – over the academic and more elevated monastic and scholarly knowledge.

Alfred mourns the inability of his people to understand their rich literary heritage:

Ðā ic ðā ðis eall gemunde, ðā gemunde ic ēac hū ic geseah, ær ðæm ðe hit eall forhergod wære ond forbærned, hū ðā ciricean giond eall Angelcynn stōdon māðma ond bōca gefyldæ, ond ēac micel mengeo Godes ðīowa; ond ðā swiðe lýtle fiorme ðāra bōca wiston, for ðæm ðe hīe hiora nānwuht ongiotan ne meahton, for ðæm ðe hīe nāeron on hiora āgen geðīode āwritene (Whitelock 5-6).

[When I remembered all this, then I also remembered how, before it was all ravaged and burnt, I had seen how the churches throughout all England stood filled with treasures and books, and there was also a great multitude of God's servants – they had very little benefit from those books, because they could not understand anything of them, since they were not written in their own language (Swanton 31)].

He then follows this statement with a very effective simile:

Swelce hīe cwæden: 'Ūre ieldran, ðā ðe ðās stōwa ær hīoldon, hīe lufodon wīsdōm, ond ðurh ðone hīe begēaton welan ond ūs lāfdon. Hēr mon mæg gīet gesion hiora swæð, ac wē him ne cunnon æfter spyrigean. For ðæm wē habbað nū ægðer forlæten ge ðone welan ge ðone wīsdōm, for ðæm ðe wē noldon tō ðæm spore mid ūre mōde onlūtan (Whitelock 6).

[As if they had said: 'Our forefathers who formerly held these places loved knowledge, and through it they acquired wealth and left it to us. One can see their footprints here still, but we cannot follow after them and therefore we have now

lost both the wealth and the knowledge because we would not bend our mind to that course' (Swanton 31)].

Perhaps then this philosophy applies to the *Chronicle* as well, implying that Alfred was not lowering the standards of literacy by putting these texts into the lay language; he is taking as his precedent similar practices regarding the Hebrew Law by Greek, Roman, and Christian nations (Whitelock 6; Swanton 31).

Alfred's preface validates the established scholarly Latin traditions of the past by saying that "ðāra gōdena wiotena ðe giū wæron giond Angelcynn, ond ðā bēc be fullan eallæ geliornod hæfdon" [*those good wise men who formerly existed throughout the English people and had fully studied all those books*] did not translate them into their own language because

"hīe ne wēndon ðætte æfre menn sceolden swæ recceleāse weorðan ond sīo lār swæ oðfeallan: for ðære wilnunga hīe hit forlēton, ond woldon ðæt hēr ðy mārā wīsdōm on londe wære ðy wē mā geðēoda cūðon"

[they did not imagine that men should ever become so careless and learning so decayed; they refrained from it by intention and hoped that there would be the greater knowledge in this land the more languages we knew].

At the same time he acknowledges the current need of the lay majority of non-Latin readers by saying "for ðy mē ðyncð betre, gif īow swæ ðyncð, ðæt wē ēac sumæ bēc, ðā ðe nīedbeðearfosta sīen eallum monnum tō wiotonne, ðæt wē ðā on ðæt geðīode wenden ðe wē ealle gecnāwan mægen" [*therefore it seems better to me, if it seems so to you, that we also should translate certain books which are most necessary for all men to know, into the language that we can all understand*]. He also is careful to put the practical necessities first, asking that "eall sīo gioguð ðe nū is on Angelcynne frīora monna, ðāra ðe ðā spēda hæbben ðæt hīe ðæm befēolan mægen,

sīen tō liornunga oðfæste, ðā hwīle ðe hīe tō nānre oðerre note ne mægen” *[all the youth of free men now among the English people, who have the means to be able to devote themselves to it, may be set to study for as long as they are of no other use]*, and that their first task is to learn how to read English well and then perhaps progress to Latin and holy orders. He ends finally with a bit of flattery to his bishops throughout England so that they might all the more easily be persuaded to agree; Alfred informs them that he is sending a copy of this, complete with a valuable bookmark, to each of his bishops, who are among those he mentions when saying that “uncūð hū longe ðær swā gelærede biscepas sīen, swā swā nū, Gode ðonc, welhwær siendon” *[it is uncertain how long there may be such learned bishops, as now, thanks be to God, there are almost everywhere]* (Whitelock 6-7; Swanton 31-32).

In recording their people’s past, the English not only consolidated their national identity by establishing a common history in which they can take pride, but they also reaffirmed the legitimacy of their native language and especially the legitimacy of its literary use. The *Chronicle*’s beginnings are a testament to its collective and national nature; Cecily Clark comments that “here and there a certain English patriotism may colour the narrative (xxxiii). The gathering together of different materials establishes part of the *Chronicle*’s ethos from the start. The *Chronicle* is an attempt at both a grand history of England as well as smaller histories of each of its parts, a collective as well as personal record of existence and achievement.

CHAPTER 3

THE FOUNDING OF MEDESHAMSTEDE ABBEY, ITS FIRST DESTRUCTION, AND ITS FIRST REBUILDING

E is, according to Charles Plummer, a “highly composite document,” consisting of both national *Chronicle* material and local Peterborough insertions. As scholarship on the subject has demonstrated, all extant versions of the *Chronicle* likely come from one source – an original, lost *Alfredian Chronicle – but the variations among versions reflect a localized flavor. The original recension was sent out and continued at various monasteries around Anglo-Saxon England, with the scribes at each place inserting local material and commentaries. The *Peterborough Chronicle* (*E*) is one such flavored version. Plummer comments that *E* “in its present form” is without a doubt a Peterborough Chronicle, as “from 654 to the very last entry in 1154 it is full of notices bearing on the local history of Peterborough.”⁶ However, Plummer does note a difference between the earlier Peterborough insertions and the later. As demonstrated by “a comparison with other MSS., combined with a study of the language of the entries themselves,” the earlier were inserted later into

a non-Peterborough Chronicle, whereas of the later Peterborough notices the explanation is that the Chronicle itself has become original, and therefore local; so that local events naturally find their way into it alongside of others of a more general character, and are clothed in language of the same texture as the rest (2: xlv).

Plummer concludes that in all likelihood,

this Chronicle was not transplanted to Peterborough before 1121, that there it was transcribed, the Peterborough additions, and probably the first two groups of Latin entries, being inserted in the process of transcription, and the later entries added in the usual way by different hands at different times. It follows, then, that all the Peterborough entries up to 1121 inclusive, are interpolations; and the fact that where they do not form complete annals, they always come at the end of the annals, causing repetition or the derangement of the chronology, is a strong confirmation of this view (2: liv).

The insertions of these Peterborough passages locate the monastery within a greater context of British history, establishing Peterborough's importance and place within a national identity; these passages also lend the institution not only credibility but also legitimacy, recording ("creating" might often be a more appropriate word), whether legitimately or spuriously, charters that attest to the monastery's establishment, endowments, and freedoms, pointing to both royal and divine attestations of its legitimacy. More than once, the scribes use particular annals within *E* to reassert the monastery's legitimacy and independence from the crown, referring back to, perhaps embellishing, or simply creating an historical precedent or royal decree that originally established and set apart the monastery.

Thus, *E* offers not only general commentary on Britain's history but also specific pieces of Peterborough's past, presented often very personally and with emotionally evocative comments from the scribes. Through these annals, some of which are minimal, some of which are full and picturesque, the scribes create a vivid account of British history as it affects Peterborough in particular. From its establishment in 654 until the end of *E* in 1154, roughly 500

years, one sees the fledgling Medeshamstede grow into the well-endowed, prosperous Peterborough Abbey, all while the Abbey faces royal and legal challenges to its independent status, catastrophic conflagrations, corrupt abbots, pilferings and raids from both the Danes and from its own tenants, and unwelcome intrusions by the crown. Peterborough consistently and repeatedly demonstrates its resiliency. While at a number of points in history Peterborough escapes forces that would have redefined it, at other points the abbey was also forced to submit to unwanted control and influence: several destructions of the monastery by fire, subsequent rebuildings, and the tumultuous appointment of a despised French abbot are a few examples. Although despair and desperation resulting from these and other events are evident throughout, *E* nonetheless clearly defines the inhabitants of Peterborough, both lay and ecclesiastical, as a staunchly independent and resilient group. These people maintained their ethnic allegiances and national identities despite the long succession of rulers and abbots of different nationalities and characters, the frequent destruction of the monastery, and the monastery's changing economic status.

E's opening section is an introductory piece consisting of rather short and general passages on the history of Britain and its early inhabitants, going all the way back to Julius Caesar and the sixty years before Christ's birth. The annals begin right at 1 A.D., and entries up to 449 A.D. generally consist of only a few lines (though some are slightly longer) and are mostly concerned with Roman and British interaction. At 449, what Evans calls "the beginnings of English history" (54), comes the lengthiest entry to that point (excepting the introduction). It establishes the founding figures and peoples of Britain, including Hengest and Horsa, the brothers credited with being descended from Woden himself (this genealogy, like many of the charters recorded in *E*, is probably a literary creation).

The first mention of the monastery comes in 654. At its founding, the institution was called not Peterborough but “Medeshamstede.” The changing names of the monastery often indicate its purposes (the addition of “burh” signifying, for example, its fortification) as well as its improving economic situation (as “Golden Borough” when the monastery was prosperous).

Donald Mackreth quotes the explanation of Hugh Candidus, Peterborough monk-historian, for why this site on the edge of the fens was chosen for Medeshamstede: “this Burgh is built in a fair spot and goodly because on one side it is rich in fenland and on the other it has an abundance of ploughlands and woods with many fertile meadows and pastures. On all sides it is beautiful to look upon” (1). It is only appropriate, then, that such a beautiful setting give rise to “the great Mercian monastery of Medeshamstede [... that] gave a powerful impetus to the work of the Church in the area” (Steane 74).

Certainly beauty is not the sole motivation behind this choice of site. Mackreth posits that there were political reasons as well. In 654, according to *E*, the pagan King Penda was killed and was succeeded by his Christian son Peada, who established a monastery at Medeshamstede. Mackreth argues that “the Mercian royal house only really came into being towards the end of the sixth century when the family, having taken part in the earlier sixth-century invasion of East Anglia, decided to move west with its followers. The logic is that their route would have been through the Peterborough region” (Mackreth 2-3). Mackreth also speculates that, because he was set by his father to guard this part of Mercia (Peada was made King of the Middle Angles in 652) and because if he were to be married at this time missionaries would naturally come, Peada would have had his royal residence in this same area. Mackreth gives the pre-existing Roman site and the rock on which it sits as another reason for this choice of setting.

The question of who founded the church is problematic, however, and local history outside of *E*, at least according to Mackreth, does not necessarily support 654 as the date of the founding or Peada as the founder. Mackreth claims that

the only record of the founding of the monastery here is in Bede's *History of the English Church*, in which he says that Saxulf, the *constructor* and Abbot of Medeshamstede, was made Bishop of Mercia when Winfrid was deposed. The date of this event was about 674. The term *constructor* is usually translated as founder. We do not have good evidence for the date of the actual foundation at all, but local tradition in the twelfth century said that the monastery came into being under King Peada (3).

Perhaps the "local tradition" he refers to is that recorded in *E*. Plummer adds further that Bede calls Sexwulf himself '*constructor et abbas monasterii quod dicitur Medeshamstedi*' [...] He says nothing about Peada and Oswy. Perhaps they may have joined in granting the land for the foundation, as Cynegils and Oswald granted Dorchester to Birinus [...] and as Egfrid granted to Benedict Biscop the land for the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow (2: 25).

The 654 annal of the *Peterborough Chronicle* records the founding of Medeshamstede Abbey like this:

Her Oswiu ofsloh Pendan on Winwidfelda, 7 ·xxx·cynebearna mid him. 7 þa wæron sume ciningas. ðere sum wæs Æðelhere Annan broðer East Engla ciningas. Ða wæs agan fram fruman middan geardes fif þusend wintra. 7 ·dccc· wintra. 7 Peada feng to Myrcena rice Pending.

On his time þa comon togadere heo 7 Oswiu Oswaldes broðor cyningas. 7 sprecon þ hi wolden an mynstre areren Criste to loue 7 Sçe⁷ Petre to wurðminte. And hi swa diden. 7 nama hit gauen Medeshamstede. forþan þet ðær is an wæl þe is gehaten Medeswæl. 7 hi ongunnan þa þ grundwalla. 7 þær on wrohten. betahten hit þa an munec, SAXULF wæs gehaten. He wæs swyðe Godes freond. 7 him luuede al þeode. 7 he wæs swyðe æþelboren on weorulde 7 rice. he is nu mycelne riccere mid Criste (Plummer 1: 29).

[In this year Oswy slew Penda at Winwidfeld and 30 princes with him, and some of them were kings; one of them was Æthelhere, brother of Anna, king of East Anglia. Then five thousand eight hundred years had passed away from the beginning of the world. And Peada, son of Penda, succeeded to the kingdom of Mercia.

In his time they came together, he and Oswy, brother of king Oswald, and declared that they wished to establish a monastery to the glory of Christ and to the honour of St Peter. And they so did, and gave it the name Medeshamstede [Peterborough], because there is a spring there called Medeswæl. And then they began the foundations and built upon them, and then entrusted it to a monk who was called Seaxwulf. He was a great friend of God, and all people loved him, and he was very nobly born in the world and powerful. He is now much more powerful with Christ (Garmonsway 29)].

This annal notes the death of King Penda and the succession of his son Peada to the Mercian throne. It further notes that Peada and Oswy said they would raise a monastery to worship Christ and honor Saint Peter, and they named it, according to the annal, for “Mede’s well” that existed

there. Symon Gunton, in his 1686 *History of the Church of Peterburgh* speculates about the naming of the place and offers further evidence: “the Village was at the first called by the name of *Medeshamsted*, from a deep Pit or Gulf, in the River of *Nen* called *Medeswell*” (1). The Reverend W. D. Sweeting delivers a much drier and more stringent account in his 1868 *Historical and Architectural Notes on the Parish Churches In and Around Peterborough*. He claims the name “Medeshamstede” is “a name that seems to describe itself, since MEDE is a meadow, HAM a home, and STEAD a place,” and that “the revived importance of the town after the restoration of the monastery in the 10th cent. is said to have originated the name BURG, or BURGH” (22).

In addition to citing the source of the name “Medeshamstede,” the scribe of the 654 annal also records the beginning of the groundwall or foundation wall of the church, though so little is left of the original building that this wall is impossible to identify now. This annal ends with the naming of Seaxwulf, “God’s friend,” as abbot Seaxwulf became the first bishop in 675, according to Greenall. From the founding of this monastery, “a policy of establishing religious colonies from Medeshamstede followed.” Some of these religious colonies were at Brixworth, Breedon-on-the-Hill, Peakirk, Weedon Beck, Castor, and Oundle. Medeshamstede, then, became a hub of religious institution in northern Northamptonshire (24).

These annals revolving around the monastery’s establishment not only record the monastery’s beginnings but also serve as an informal charter, certifying the legitimacy of the monastery’s independence. Annal 656, a testimony to the foundations of Peterborough’s history, is an even lengthier passage than annal 449, which testifies to the foundings of all of British history. The naming and inclusion of key political figures, both royal and ecclesiastic, who confirm the monastery’s legitimacy reaffirms the monastery’s claim. Plummer is quick to remind

his readers that this charter is spurious, pointing to various pieces of evidence, two of which are presented here: this entry is based on a Latin charter that was “a forgery probably of the time of Edgar” (2: 25) and the scribe uses the word “eorles,” which “alone stamps this document as a forgery. In the sense meant here (=ealdorman) it represents the Scandinavian ‘iarl,’ and only came in with the Danish conquests” (Plummer 2:27).

The 656 annal records the death of Peada, the monastery’s founder, and the succession of Wulfhere to the Mercian throne, though again Plummer notes an inaccuracy in that Wulfhere did not immediately succeed to the throne after Peada’s death; instead, “his accession was the result of a successful rebellion of Mercia against Oswy in 658” (2:25). The Peterborough scribe notes that the monastery had grown very wealthy and that King Wulfhere loved “hit swiðe for his broðer luuen Peada. ⁊ for his wed broðeres luuen Oswi. ⁊ for Saxulfes luuen þes abbodes” [*loved it much for love of his brother Peada, and for love of his sworn brother, Oswy, and for love of Seaxwulf, its abbot*]. Wulfhere wished “hit wurðminten ⁊ arwurðen” [*to honour and reverence it*] on the advice of a number of key figures: his brothers Æthelred and Merewala, his sisters Cyneburh and Cyneswith, archbishop Deusdedit, and his counselors (Plummer 1: 29; Garmonsway 29). Wulfhere sends for abbot Seaxwulf and tells him,

Ða cwæd se kyning to þan abbode. La leof Sæxulf ic haue geseond æfter þe for mine saule þurfe. ⁊ ic hit wile þe wæl secgon for hwi. Min broðor Peada ⁊ min leoue freond Oswi ongunnen an mynstre Criste to loue ⁊ Sanct Petre. oc min broðer is faren of þisse liue swa swa Crist wolde. oc ic wile ðe gebidden la leoue freond þ híf wirce æuostlice on þere werce. ⁊ ic þe wile finden þær to gold ⁊ siluer, land ⁊ ahte. ⁊ al þet þær to behofeð. Ða feorde se abbot ham ⁊ ongan to wircene, swa he spedde swa him Crist huðe. swa þet in feuna geare wæs þ

mynstre gare. Ða þa kyning heorda þæt geseogon. þa wærð he swiðe glæd. heot seonden geond al his þeode. æfter alle his þægne. æfter ærcebiscop. 7 æfter biscopes. 7 æfter his eorles. 7 æfter alle þa þe Gode luuedon, þæt hi scoldon to him cumene. 7 seotte þa dæi hwonne man scolde þ̅ mynstre gehalegon (Plummer 1: 29-30).

[‘O beloved Seaxwulf, I have sent for you for my soul’s need, and I wish freely to tell you why. My brother Peada and my dear friend Oswy began a monastery to the glory of Christ and St Peter, but my brother, as Christ willed it, has departed this life, but I wish to ask you, O beloved friend, to have them labour quickly at the work, and I will provide you with gold and silver, land and property, and all that is needed for it.’ The abbot went home and began to work. As Christ granted him so he succeeded, so that in a few years the monastery was finished. When the king heard tell of this, he was very glad. He bade send throughout his kingdom for all his thanes, for the archbishop, for bishops, for his earls, and for all those who loved God, that they should come to him; and he appointed a day when the monastery was to be consecrated (Garmonsway 29-30)].

The scribe relates this event with an emphasis on God’s desire for this monastery’s existence and on royal desire, both Peada’s and Wulfhere’s. By frequently reiterating each of the key figures’ statements that it was God’s desire for these things to happen, the scribe establishes a theoretically indisputable reason for existence: God’s will. Peada built it for the glory of Christ; Peada’s brother continues the work for his “saule þurfe” [*soul’s need*], and this job of continuing it is now his because “Crist wolde” [*Christ willed*] that Peada “is faren of þisse liue” [*has departed this life*]; Christ grants Seaxwulf success in this endeavor and the monastery is

completed in only a few years. The scribe also has the King state specifically what kinds of things Wulfhere is endowing the monastery with, things that invaders and intruders try at various points to take from the monastery (sometimes with success): gold, silver, land, property, and, more generally, “al þæt þær to behofeð” [*all that is needed for it*]. Further, the King’s sponsorship is attested by the presence of *all* the most important political figures: “alle his þægne. æfter ærcebiscop. 7 æfter biscopas. 7 æfter his eorlas. 7 æfter alle þa þe Gode luuedon” [*all his thanes, for the archbishop, for bishops, for his earls, and for all those who loved God*]; this alignment of the monastery’s founding with the support of “alle þa þe Gode luuedon” [*all those who loved God*] underscores the reputedly divinely-approved foundations of the monastery.

The scribe offers a list of the King and his siblings, bishops, a priest, and the King’s thanes who were all present at the dedication. The people in attendance represent the ruling royal and ecclesiastical forces and add further weight to the monastery’s legitimacy. What follows this passage is the King’s speech in which he specifies his land endowments and pronounces the abbey free from subjugation to the crown. The lands and qualities the scribe records as having been spoken by the King are important, for they create a charter to which the monastery can refer whenever its legitimacy is questioned:

Ða seo mynstre wæs gehalgod [...] þa stod seo kyning up toforen ealle his ðægna. 7 cwæd luddor stefne. Ðancod wurð hit þon hæge Ælmihti God þis wurðscipe þ her is gedon. 7 ic wile wurðigen þis dæi Crist 7 Sçe Peter. 7 ic wille þ ge ealle getiðe mine worde. Ic Wulfere gife to dæi Sçe Petre 7 þone abbode Saxulf 7 þa munecas of þe mynstre þas landes 7 þas wateres 7 meres 7 fennes 7 weres 7 ealle þa landes þa þær abuton liggeð ða of mine kynerice sindon freolice. swa ðet nan

man na haue þær nan onsting buton seo abbot 7 se muneces [...] Ða cwæð seo kyning. Hit is litel þeos gife. ac ic wille þ hi hit hælden swa kynelice 7 swa freolice. þ þær ne be numen of na geld na gaule. buton to þa munecan ane. Ðus ic wille freon þis mynstre þet hit ne be underþed buton Rome ane. 7 hider ic wille þ we secan Sçe Petre. ealle þa þa to Rome na magen faren (Plummer 1: 30-31).

[When the monastery had been consecrated [...] then the king stood up before all his thanes and spoke in a loud voice, 'Thanks be to the High Almighty God for this ceremony which has been performed here, and I intend this day to honour Christ and St Peter, and I wish that ye all approve my words. I, Wulfhere, to-day freely give to St Peter and to the abbot Seaxwulf and the monks of the monastery these lands and these waters and meres and fens and weirs and all the lands that are situated thereabout which belong to my kingdom, so that no man shall have any authority there except the abbot and the monks [...]'] [...] Then spake the king, 'This is but a small benefaction, but I desire that they hold it so royally and freely that neither tax nor rent be taken from it except for the monks alone. Thus I desire to free this monastery so that it be subject only to Rome; and I desire that all of us who cannot go to Rome come to visit St Peter here' (Garmonsway 30-31)].

Not only then does the King richly endow the monastery with lands and free it from any control but Rome's, but he also further heightens the importance of the monastery by making it the local 'alternative' to Rome. The King has his brother Æthelred and his sisters Cyneburh and Cyneswith witness the charter, and then exhorts

ealle þa ða æfter me cumen, beon hi mine sunes. beon hi mine breðre, ouþer kyningas þa æfter me cumen. þ ure gyfe mote standen. swa swa hi willen beon delnimende on þa ece lif. 7 swa swa hi wilen æt beorstan þet ece wite. Swa hwa swa ure gife ouþer oðre godene manne gyfe wansiþ. wansie him seo heofenlice iateward on heofonrice. 7 swa hwa swa hit eceð. ece him seo heofenlice iateward on heofenrice (Plummer 1: 31).

[all my successors, be they my sons, be they my brothers, or kings that shall succeed me, that our benefaction may stand, according as they desire to be partakers of the life everlasting and escape eternal punishment. Whosoever shall diminish our benefaction or the benefactions of other good men, may the heavenly doorkeeper diminish him in the kingdom of heaven; and whosoever shall make it greater, may the heavenly doorkeeper make him greater in the kingdom of heaven” (Garmonsway 31)].

The rest of this part of the annal contains another long and formal list of all those who witness the charter with a cross, further attesting to the validity of the monastery:

Ic Wulfere kyning mid þas kyningas 7 mid eorles 7 mid heorotogas 7 mid þægnas þas gewitnesse mines gifes toforan þone ærcebiscop Deusdedit ic hit festnia mid Cristes mel. +. And ic Oswi Norþhimbre kyning þeos mynstres freond. 7 þes abbotes Saxulf hit loue. mid Cristes mel. +. And ic Sighere kyning hit tyðe mid Crystes mel. + (Plummer 1: 32).

[I, king Wulfhere, in conjunction with these kings and earls, leaders of the army and thanes, the witnesses of my benefaction, do confirm it before archbishop Deusdedit with a cross +. And I, Oswy, king of Northumbria, friend of this

monastery and of abbot Seaxwulf, approve it with a cross +. And I, king Sigehere, grant it with a cross + (Garmonsway 32)].

The remainder of the witnesses are presented in a similar pattern of statement of name and signing of the cross, what Garmonsway calls a “formula of attestation” (31). As an additional certification of the monastery’s independence, the scribe includes a passage about pope Vitalian’s papal bull regarding Medeshamstede:

Ic Uitalianus papa geate þe Wulfere cyning 7 Deusdedit ærcebiscop 7 Saxulf ab̄b ealle þe þing þe ge geornon. 7 ic forbede þet ne kyning. ne nan man ne haue nan onsting buton þon ab̄b ane. ne he ne hersumie nan man buton þone papa on Rome 7 se ærcebiscop on Cantwarbyrig. Gif hwa þis tobrekeþ æniþing. Sçe Petre mid his sweord him adylige. Gif hwa hit hælt. S. Petre mid heofne keie undo him heofen rice (Plummer 1: 33).

[I, pope Vitalian, grant to you, king Wulfere, and to archbishop Deusdedit and to abbot Seaxwulf all the things which you ask, and I forbid any king or any man to have any authority there except the abbot alone, and that he obey no man except the pope of Rome and the archbishop of Canterbury. If anyone violates this in any respect, may St Peter destroy him with his sword: if anyone observes it, may St Peter with the key of heaven open to him the kingdom of heaven (Garmonsway 33)].

The scribe concludes the whole section with “Ðus wæs seo mynstre Medeshamstede agunnen. þ man siððon cleopede Burh” *[Thus was the monastery at Medeshamstede begun, which afterwards was called Burh]* (Plummer 1: 33; Garmonsway 33).

Between these annals describing the founding of the monastery and the annal recording its first destruction in 869, the Peterborough scribe inserts at various intervals statements that remind his audience of the monastery's legitimate independence and that record various further endowments, expansions, and increases of the monastery's resources. One example comes in the 675 annal, where the scribe claims a papal reaffirmation of the monastery's independence, remarking that Æthelred, after ascending the throne upon Wulfhere's death, sent

to Rome Wilfrid biscop to þam pape þe þa wes. Agatho he wæs gehaten. 7 cydde him mid writ 7 mid worde. hu his breðre Peada 7 Wulfhere 7 se abbot Saxulf heafden wroht an minstre Medeshamstede wæs gehaten. 7 þ hi hit heafden gefreod wið kyning 7 wið biscop of ealle þew dom. 7 bed him þ he scolde þ geten mid his writ 7 mid his bletsunge. And seo papa seonde þa his gewrite to Englalande þus cweðende (Plummer 1: 35).

[sent bishop Wilfrid to Rome to the pope that then was, who was called Agatho, and made known to him by letters and verbally how his brothers, Peada and Wulfhere, and the abbot Seaxwulf had built a monastery which was called Medeshamstede, and that they had freed it of all service to king and bishop, and asked him to confirm this with his bull and with his blessing. And the pope sent his bull then to England" (Garmonsway 35)].

What follows as recorded by the scribe is a confirmation that “ne kyning ne biscop ne eorl. ne nan man ne haue nan onsting. ne gafle ne geold ne feording ne nanes cinnes ðeudom ne nime man of þ abbot rice of Medeshamstede” *[neither king nor bishop nor earl nor any man shall have any authority there or rent or tax or military service, nor shall anyone exact any kind of service from the abbey of Medeshamstede]*, that the abbot “beo gehealden for legat of Rome ofer

eal þ̅ iglande. 7 hwilc abbot þ̅ beþ̅ þ̅ær coren of þ̅e munecan þ̅ he beo gebletsad of þ̅an ærcebiscop of Cantwarbyrig” *[be considered as legate from Rome over the whole island; and whatever abbot be there elected by the monks that he be consecrated by the archbishop of Canterbury]*, and that Medeshamstede can offer “ilce forgiueneſſe of Criſte 7 S. Peter. 7 of þ̅onne abbot 7 of þ̅one muneca” *[the same forgiveness from Christ and St Peter and from the abbot and from the monks]* as from Rome if one could not go to Rome. The pope then asks that “þ̅is write wurðe geredd 7 gehealdon” *[this bull be read and observed]* and further commands that

swa swa [Seaxwulf] hit geornest. þ̅ seo mynſtre beo freo. swa ic forbeode [him] 7 ealle þ̅e biſcopas þ̅e æfter [him] cumon of Criſte 7 of ealle hiſ halgan þ̅ ge nan onſting ne hauen of þ̅ mynſtre buton swa micel swa þ̅one abbot wile (Plummer 1:36).

[just as [bishop Seaxwulf] wish[es] the monastery to be free, so I forbid [him] and all those bishops that succeed [him], by Christ and all his saints, to have any authority over the monastery except in so far as the abbot shall permit (Garmonsway 36)].

The bull ends with the usual warning against ignoring these commands. Next, Æthelred enlarges the holdings of the monastery, adding that all that his brothers and sisters

geafon 7 getton S̅ce Peter 7 þ̅one abbot þ̅a wile ic þ̅ ſtande. 7 ic wile on min d̅æi hit æcon for here ſawle. 7 for minre ſawle [...] Ðas landeſ ic gife S̅ce Peter eal swa freolice swa ic ſeolf hit ahte. 7 swa þ̅ nan min æftergengleſ þ̅ær nan þ̅ing of ne nime. Giſ hwa hit doð. þ̅eſ papa curſ of Rome 7 ealre biſcope curſ he habbe. 7

here ealre þe her be gewitnesse. 7 þis ic festnie mid Cristes tacne.+ (Plummer 1: 37).

*[gave and granted to St Peter and the abbot, these I desire to remain undisturbed, and I wish in my day to increase it for the salvation of their souls and mine [...]
These lands I give St Peter with the same freedom from control as when I held them, and so that none of my successors take anything therefrom. If anyone do so, may he have the curse of the pope of Rome and the curse of all bishops and of all those who here are witnesses, and I confirm this with a cross +” (Garmonsway 37)].*

Then follows a list of witnesses, most explicitly agreeing to the pope’s curse, some adding their own curses against those who break these edicts. Plummer contends that once again, like the charter that records the founding of the monastery, this Peterborough addition is also a spurious charter:

It is hardly necessary to call attention to the flagrant character of the forgery, and the extravagant nature of the privileges claimed [...] The spurious Latin charter on which this insertion is based is in Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici* No.990; Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum* No.48; Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland* iii. 153-157; v. note, *ib.* 168. It differs somewhat from the present AS. version, but the differences are not on the side of greater modesty. ‘The first *real* case of exemption of an English monastery from episcopal jurisdiction appears to have been that of Battle Abbey, Hallam’s *Middle Ages*, ii. 165 note; Robertson, *Church Hist.* ii. 103, 203.’ Earle (2: 30).

Peterborough insertions in annals 686, 779, and 852 note expansion and increase of profits for Medeshamstede. The 686 annal mentions that “Her Ceadwala 7 Mul his broðor forhergodan Cent 7 Wiht. Ðæs Cædwala gef into sçe Petres minstre Medeshamstede Hoge. þ is in an igland Heabureahg hatte” [*in this year Cædwalla and Mul, his brother, laid waste Kent and the Isle of Wight. This Cædwalla gave to St Peter’s monastery of Medeshamstede the place Hoo, which is on an island called Avery*] (Plummer 1: 39; Garmonsway 39). The 777 annal relates that abbot Beonna granted a lease to ealdorman Cuthbert of “·x· bonde land at Swines heafde mid læswe 7 mid mædwe. 7 mid eal þet ðær to læi” [*ten farms at Swineshead, with pasture and with meadow and all appurtenances*] under the terms of 50 pounds, a day’s supply of food or 30 shillings, given yearly, and the reversion of the land back to the monastery upon Cuthbert’s death (Plummer 1: 52; Garmonsway 52). Plummer remarks disdainfully, “We reach the lowest point when we have a lease of monastic lands embodied in a national chronicle” (2: 54); rather than dismissing this inclusion as signifying an abasement of national record, however, it may be considered a telling truth about Peterborough: it was perhaps quite anxious to assert itself as a prosperous, land-wealthy monastery that was important and powerful. In that same year, another ealdorman, Brorda, asked the King to free the church of Woking so he could give it to Medeshamstede. Especially noteworthy in this section about Brorda and Woking is the inclusion of the following:

7 seo kyning freode þa þ mynstre Wocingas wið cining 7 wið biscop 7 wið eorl. 7 wið ealle men. swa þ nan man ne hafde þær nan onsting. buton S. Peter 7 þone ab (Plummer 1: 53).

[And the king freed the church of Woking from all obligations due to the king and to bishop and to earl and to all men, so that no one should have any authority there, except St Peter and the abbot (Garmonsway 53)].

This, just as in *E*'s earlier charters and records of endowment, provides further evidence (albeit likely manufactured) of Peterborough's independence from all authority but Rome's. The 852 annal records another lease on similar terms, this time to Wulfred. Wulfred was also required, however, to give "þ land of Sliowaforda into Medeshamstede" [*the estate at Sleaford to Medeshamstede*], and supply yearly a number of goods to the monastery, including wood, brushwood, and bundles of branches,⁸ clear ale and Welsh ale, cattle, bread, a horse, thirty shillings, and a day's supply of food (Plummer 1: 65; Garmonsway 65). As these records reflect, Medeshamstede was at least moderately prosperous, well-endowed and able to lease its lands for good returns.

The First Destruction of Medeshamstede

The *Chronicle* first mentions Danish attacks in 793, during which the Danes destroyed the church of Lindisfarne in Northumbria. In 796, the Danes ravaged Northumbria and destroyed the monastery of Donemup. The scribe notes that the Danish threat drew even closer to Peterborough in 868, as the army took winter-quarters in Nottingham. The *Chronicle* records a progressive path of Scandinavian destruction that eventually comes to Medeshamstede. The 870 annal comments that

Her for se here ofer Myrce innon East Ængle. 7 wintersetle naman æt ðeodforda.
7 on þam geare sçe Ædmund cining him wið gefeaht. 7 þa Deniscan sige naman. 7
þone cining ofslogon. 7 þ land eall geeodon. 7 forðiden ealle þa mynstre þa hi to

comen. on þa ilcan tima þa comon hi to Medeshamstede, beorndon 7 bræcon.
slogon abbot 7 munecas. 7 eall þ hi þær fundon. macedon hit þa þ ær wæs ful rice.
þa hit wearð to nan þing (Plummer 1:71).

[In this year the host went across Mercia into East Anglia, and took winter-quarters at Thetford; and the same winter St Edmund the king fought against them, and the Danes won the victory, and they slew the king and overran the entire kingdom, and destroyed all the monasteries to which they came. At that same time they came to the monastery at Medeshamstede and burned and demolished it, and slew the abbot and monks and all that they found there, reducing to nothing what had once been a very rich foundation (Garmonsway 71)].

Half of this passage, beginning with “7 forðiden ealle þa mynstre” [*and destroyed all the monasteries*] is a Peterborough insertion, characterized by Plummer as “very interesting” (2: 87) and “closely connected with the general history of the country” (2: xl), as the Danes frequently destroyed monasteries in the areas they invaded. The Peterborough scribe, in the line “macedon hit þa þ ær wæs ful rice. þa hit wearð to nan þing” [*reducing to nothing what had once been a very rich foundation*], mourns that such a fine monastery could be laid low and so many of its members murdered. The monastery did not recuperate for at least a century (Greenall 25).

During the later part of this first wave of attacks, around the second half of the ninth century, the Danes began to settle the areas they had invaded, creating at first an informal region of Danish control whose boundaries were “established and defined” by “a treaty between King Alfred and the Danish King Guthrum” at some point between 886 and 890. This region was further solidified as a separate political entity by King Edgar between 970 and 974, when he

declared that “the Danish areas should be governed by such laws as they themselves thought best”; however, the term “Danelaw” is not specifically mentioned until “a law compiled in 1008, during the reign of King Æthelred the Unready” (Hart, *Danelaw* 3). The Danish invaders settled “in substantial numbers, and it is likely that here, as in those parts of the Danelaw north of the Welland, the first settlers were reinforced in the early years by waves of immigrants from their Scandinavian homelands,” though “Danish settlement left fewer obvious memorials in the East than in the North” (Hart, *Danelaw* 28-29). The 876 annal, for example, notes that “þy geare Healfdene Norðanhymbra land gedælde. 7 hergende weron. 7 heora tiligende wæron” [*in this year Halfdan shared out the lands of Northumbria, and [the Danish host] were engaged in ploughing and in making a living for themselves*] (Plummer 1: 75; Garmonsway 75).

Northamptonshire, as part of the Outer Danelaw, was one of the four boroughs (Bedford, Huntingdon, Cambridge, and Northampton) that were each settled by “a section of the Danish army of King Guthrum,” making them “in effect East Anglian satellites, each being ruled by its own earl, seated in or near the parent borough.” The boroughs’ boundaries were established not by the Danes but by “pre-existing Mercian centres at important river crossings from which one could control the local communications by land and water”; Hart adds that “the Danes appear to have enlarged them and strengthened their defences” (Hart, *Danelaw* 10).

Between the retreat of the Romans and the invasion of the Danes, a period of roughly four hundred years, the Anglo-Saxons had developed a shared farming economy, a system that lasted in some areas until the nineteenth century. This economy “led them to settle in nucleated villages, rather than in scattered farms, and to operate the open-field system of cultivation” (Greenall 25). When the Danish invaded and then settled in Northamptonshire, they became participants in this system of open cultivation. Greenall says there “was, no doubt, plenty of

room for them”; he also notes that they settled mostly north of Northampton and in the fens, ostensibly near the Peterborough region, exerted much influence especially over the system of boroughs, political administration, and land division, and “did much to develop the local economy” (27).

Reestablishing and Renaming of the Monastery

Early in the tenth century, Edward the Elder and his forces began to combat the Danes, using their fortification of towns to strengthen their position. Greenall points by way of example to the *Parker Chronicle*'s annal for 921, in which Edward builds and fortifies the fortresses at Towcester and Wigingamere; the Danes beseige both but are unable to conquer them. The Anglo-Saxon “fortifying of Towcester forced the Danes to give up its siege, and retreat.” The Danes surrendered, “Edward the Elder’s son, Aethelstan, completed the conquest of the Danelaw, and his grandson, Edgar, emerged as ‘the first true king of England’” (27).

During Edgar’s reign, there was a “second great era of monasticism” (27). John Blair counts this “encouragement of monastic reform” as “Edgar’s main personal achievement,” for true Benedictine monasticism seems to have been almost dead in early tenth-century England. Several great and innumerable small minsters had been destroyed by the Danes, while those which survived had tended more and more towards the loose, secular life-style that Bede had long ago deplored (103).

Edgar provided the funding, and “three great churchmen, St. Dunstan, St. Æthelwold, and St. Oswald,” helped carry it out. During the last half of the tenth century, “some fifty houses were founded or refounded under the influence of Glastonbury, Abingdon, and Westbury” and secular priests were replaced by monks. Though it was draining, Edgar generously funded the restoration

of monasteries, and “the new houses were wealthy, respected, and endowed with treasures and fine buildings [...] but it must be stressed that this spiritual and material regeneration touched only a fraction (probably under 10 per cent) of the old communities: the others continued in their former ways” (103-105). The 963 annal in *E* relates St. Æthelwold’s establishment and restoration of “feola minstra” [*many monasteries*] and his driving out of “þa clerca of þe biscoprice, forþan þ hi noldon nan regul healden” [*the secular clergy from the cathedral because they would not observe any monastic rule*], replacing them instead with monks (Plummer 1: 115; Garmonsway 115). Despite the assurances of the 964 annal that “Hic expulsi sunt canonici de ueteri monasterio” (Plummer 1: 117), Plummer remarks that “even in his own cathedral Æthelwold’s success seems to have been less complete than is commonly supposed” (2: 157), and Williams Stubbs remarks additionally that “it is doubtful whether any of the cathedrals were quite cleared of secular canons before the Conquest” (qtd. in Plummer 2: 157).

The 963 annal also records Æthelwold’s resurrection of two fenland monasteries, Ely and Medeshamstede, prefaced by the following statement:

Syððan þa com he to se cyng Eadgar. bed him þet he scolde him giuen ealle þa minstre þa hæðene men hæfden ær tobrocon. forði þet he hit wolde geeadnewion. 7 se kyng hit bliþelice tyðode (Plummer 1: 115-116).

[Then [Æthelwold] came to king Edgar and asked him to give him all the monasteries which the heathen had destroyed, because he wished to restore them: and the king cheerfully granted it (Garmonsway 115)].

The remainder of the annal is very similar in structure and in content to the 654-656 and 675 annals, the former of which records the initial founding and endowment of Medeshamstede, the

latter of which reasserts (though falsely) the independence from royal and ecclesiastical authority of that same place. The reinstatement of Medeshamstede is thus described:

Syððon com se biscop Aðelwold to þære mynstre þe wás gehaten
Medeshamstede, ðe hwilon wás fordon fra heðene folce. ne fand þær nan þing
buton ealde weallas 7 wilde wuda. fand þa hidde in þa ealde wealle writes þet
Headda ābb heafde ár gewriton, hu Wulfhere kyng 7 Æðelred his broðor hit
heafden wroht. 7 hu hi hit freodon wið king, 7 wið b, 7 wið ealle weoruld þeudom.
7 hu se papa Agatho hit feostnode mid his write. 7 se arcþ Deusededit. Leot wircen
þa þ mynstre. 7 sætte þær abbot se wás gehaten Aldulf. macede þær munecas þær
ær ne wás nan þing (Plummer 1: 115-116).

*[Afterwards came bishop Æthelwold came to the monastery called
Medeshamstede, which had been destroyed by the heathen, and found nothing
there but old walls and wild woods. He found, hidden in the old walls, documents
which had been written by abbot Hedde, telling how king Wulfhere and Æthelred,
his brother, had built it and freed it from all obligations to king, to bishop, and
from all secular service; and how pope Agatho had confirmed it with his bull, and
archbishop Deusededit also. Thereupon he had the monastery built, and appointed
there an abbot who was called Ealdwulf, and placed monks there where nothing
was before (Garmonsway 116)].*

Greenall confirms that Æthelwold helped found a new monastery and gave it great holdings (27-8). Steane places the rebuilding of the monastery around 970, seven years later than accounted for in *E*. It was restored by Æthelwold, though, as *E* says, and then taken charge of by Aldulf,

who was abbot from 972 to 999. He “cleared the woody and solitary swamp by degrees and built manor houses and granges” (74).

What follows this passage is, as mentioned before, a formula very similar to the earlier charters in *E*. Æthelwold takes the documents he has supposedly found to the King, who reaffirms the monastery’s independence:

Ic Ædgar geate 7 dife todæi toforen Gode 7 toforen þone ærceþ Dunstan freedom
Sce Petres mynstre Medeshamstede of kyng, 7 of þ. 7ealle þa þorpes þe ðærto lin.
[...] 7 swa ic hit freo þet nan biscop ne haue þær nane hæse, buton se abbot of
þone minstre [...] Ðas land 7 ealla þa oðre þe lin into þe mynstre þa cwede ic scyr
(Plummer 1: 116).

[‘I, Edgar, before God and before the archbishop Dunstan, grant and give to-day freedom to the monastery of St Peter, Medeshamstede, from the jurisdiction of king and bishop, and to all the villages which pertain thereto [...] I exempt it that no bishop shall have any authority there, only the abbot of the monastery [...] neither king nor bishop nor earl nor sheriff shall have any authority, nor any man but the abbot [...] These lands and all the others which belong to the monastery I declare free’ (Garmonsway 116)].

Edgar also specifies which lands, meres, waters, weirs, and fens belong to the monastery as well. He additionally creates an exclusive market in King’s Delph. Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury, Oswald, archbishop of York, and Æthelwold, bishop, all testify to the King’s words, to the requisite curses against all who violate the monastery’s sanctity, and to blessings for all who uphold it. Plummer suggests that these “alleged grants,” like similar ones that appear in other manuscripts, may be “of very doubtful genuineness.” He counters this, however, by referencing

Bede regarding “the manufacture of documents (not necessarily fraudulent in intention) necessitated by the ravages of the Danes” (2: 155-156). The scribe proclaims that a number of important figures ratified and signed this charter.

After this passage comes a description of the succession of abbots and of the enlargement, fortification, and renaming of the monastery:

Da bohte se abbot Aldulf landes feola 7 manega. 7 godede þa þ̅ mynstre swiðe mid ealle. 7 wæs þær þa swa lange þ̅ se arcebiscop Oswald of Eoforwic wæs forðgewiton. 7 man cæs him þa to erceb̅. 7 man cæs þa sona oðer abbot of þe sylfe mynstre, KENULF wæs gehaten. se wæs syððon biscop in Wintanceastre. 7 he macode fyrst þa wealle abutan þone mynstre. geaf hit þa ‘to’ nama **Burch**. þe ær het Medeshamstede. wæs þær swa lange þ̅ man sette him to biscop on Wintanceastre. Ða cæs man oðer abbot of þe silue minstre. þe wæs gehaten Ælfsi (Plummer 1: 117).

[The abbot Eadwulf bought many estates, and altogether richly endowed the monastery. He was there until archbishop Oswald of York passed away, and then was elected to succeed him. Another abbot was speedily chosen from the same monastery: he was called Cenwulf, who was afterwards bishop of Winchester. He was the first to build the wall around the monastery, and gave it then the name Burch, although formerly it had been known as Medeshamstede. He was there until he was appointed bishop of Winchester. Then another abbot named Ælfsige was elected from the same monastery (Garmonsway 117)].

According to *E*, Ælfsige translated the bodies of Cyneburh and Cyneswith, sisters to the monastery’s founders (Peada and Wulfhere), to Peterborough.

This part of the 963 annal describes the walling in and the renaming of the monastery to Peterborough: “Ða bohte se abbot Aldulf landes feola 7 manega. 7 godede þa þ mynstre swiðe mid ealle” [*The abbot Eadwulf bought many estates, and altogether richly endowed the monastery*], followed by a brief discussion of the succession of archbishops: first Oswald, Archbishop of York, then abbot Ealdwulf, and finally Cenwulf, another abbot from the monastery. The annal continues with, “he macode fyrst þa wealle abutan þone mynstre. geaf hit þa ‘to’ nama **Burch**. þe ær het Medeshamstede” [*He was the first to build the wall around the monastery, and gave it then the name Burch, although formerly it had been known as Medeshamstede*]. The dates do not quite match up, though, as according to Steane, abbot Cenwulf, during his abbacy from 992-1005, walled the monastery and renamed the church and town “Burgh.”

The date is not the only concern in this annal. Around this particular passage of history revolves a controversy over the renaming of Medeshamstede to Burch, Burg, Peterburgh, or Peterborough. Mackreth notes that “the name was given in Late Saxon times when it could have only one meaning, that of a defended settlement” (13). Despite the name change recorded in *E*, Steane cautions that “we cannot necessarily jump to the conclusion that the village had become a borough in the tenth century” (75). Cyril Hart notes, though, that Medeshamstede (later Peterborough) “was an extremely wealthy abbey from its foundation, and beyond a doubt a small township would have grown up outside the abbey gates at an early date, to house the abbey’s servants and their families” (“Peterborough” 243). Little evidence presented itself in support of this being a fortified city until 1982, when excavators uncovered a “wall over 6 ft thick cut into the front of an earlier bank and, apparently, replacing a timber frontage. This was part of the northern burh wall” (Mackreth 13-14). Mackreth calculates the location of the other two walls

and examines Eyre's survey of 1721, ultimately concluding, after further research, that "as a result of archaeological investigation, a look at medieval records and a piece of historical geography, the burh stands revealed, complete with market-place and agricultural community" (15-16). Plummer further adds, quoting Earle, that

though the language here is of the twelfth century, yet this statement is apparently authentic. The great fortifying era in England had been initiated by Edward, the son of Alfred. Fortified monasteries became common, and Peterborough was probably one of the earliest instances. Fortification changed the character and the moral aspect of the monastic institution, and the change of name was a natural consequence. The irregular cluster of humble edifices, which showed like any other '*homestead*' of the open country, was now encircled with a *wall*, like one of the fenced cities. Henceforth it is no more *Medeshamstede* or the *Meadow-Homestead*; but *Burh* or *Burch*, the garrison and capital of a dependent region. The fortified place became also the market-place of its district, and hence it reaped commercial advantages, direct and incidental (2: 156).

One major theme throughout the next section in *E* is that of Danish destruction. The annals convey a feeling of helplessness on the part of the English at the marauding and ravaging of the Danes, what the scribe characterizes in annal 1006 as their doing "eall swa hi ær gewuna wæron, hergodon 7 bærndon. 7 slogon swa swa hi ferdon" [*as they had been wont to do: they harried, burned, and slew as they went*] (Plummer 1: 136; Garmonsway 136). In 1010, the scribe records that the Danish destruction drew even closer to Peterborough:

þone eard ·iii· monþas hergodon 7 bærndon. gefurðon on þa wildan fennas hi ferdon. 7 menn 7 yrfe hi slogon. 7 bærndon geond þa feonnas [...] Ða æt foran scs

Andreas mæssan. ða com se here to Hamtune. 7 þone port sona forbærndon. 7 þær namon abuton swa mycel swa hi woldon sylfe (Plummer 1: 140-141).

[for three months [the Danes] harried and burnt [East Anglia], even penetrating into the uninhabited fens, slaying men and cattle, and burning throughout the fens [...] Then before St Andrew's day [30 November], the host came to Northampton and immediately destroyed the town by fire, and seized whatever they wanted in the neighboring district (Garmonsway 140-141)].

The scribe laments that tribute was not paid to the Danes at the right time, and so

ealle þas unge sælða us gelumpon þurh unrædes. þ mann nolde him to timan gafol bedan. ac þonne hi mæst to yfele gedon hæfdon. þonne nam man grið. 7 frið wið hi. 7 naðelæs for eallum þisum griðe 7 friðe 7 gafole. hi ferdon æghwider folc mælum. 7 hergodon. 7 ure earme folc ræpton 7 slogon (Plummer 1: 141).

[all these misfortunes befell us by reason of bad policy in that tribute was not offered them in time; but when they had done their worst, then it was that peace was made with them. And not withstanding all this truce and peace and tribute, they went about everywhere in bands, and robbed and slew our unhappy people (Garmonsway 141).]

This section, not being a Peterborough insertion, may be taken as one small bit of evidence of a growing national identity, especially indicated by the use of “ure earme folc” [*our unhappy people*], with “ure” [*our*] establishing a group (and thus national) identification.

In 1013, the Five Boroughs surrendered to King Swein. Swein died the next year, in 1014, and King Cnut in his stead rallied forces against the English. Æthelred, however, newly made king, attacked and conquered Cnut's forces; Cnut put out to sea and escaped. In 1018, the

English and Danish made an agreement at Oxford after the English paid 72,000 pounds in tribute, in addition to the 11,000 pounds paid by Londoners.

In 1041 abbot Ælfsige of Peterborough died and Earnwig was elected in his place “forþan þe he wæs swiðe god man 7 swiðe bilehwit” [*because he was a very good man and very sincere*] (Plummer 1: 163; Garmonsway 163); in 1052 Earnwig resigned and Leofric took over. Leofric had the King’s permission as well as the approval of the monks, and the scribe notes that he “[go]dede þa þ mynstre swa þ man hit cleopede þa Gildene burh. þa wæx hit swi[ðe] on land 7 on gold 7 on seolfer” [*endowed the monastery thereafter so that it became known as ‘Golden Borough’: when it increased greatly in land, in gold, and in silver*] (Plummer 1: 183; Garmonsway 183), the new moniker acknowledging the monastery’s prosperity. Another reference to “gildene burh” [*golden borough*] comes in 1066, as the scribe is mourning the death of abbot Leofric, an abbot who brought prosperity to the monastery. He says that after Leofric’s passing, “Ða wearð gildene burh to wrecce burh” [*Then ‘Golden Borough’ became ‘Wretched Borough’*] (Plummer 1: 199; Garmonsway 199). Here “gildene” [*golden*] can have any number of meanings, from economic, referring to the wealth and prosperity of the monastery, to sentimental, Leofric’s years being the golden ones. The monastery’s final name change is to Peterborough, which Sweeting attributes to “the dedication of the church” (22).

During 1066, Leofric fell ill and died, and what follows in *E* is an elegy praising his greatness as an abbot and mourning the downfall of the monastery after his death, the chronicler striking what Plummer calls “that note of hopelessness and depression which characterises this Chronicle to the end” (2: 258):

On his dæg wæs ealle blisse 7 ealle gode on Burh. 7 he wæs leaf eall folc [...] he dyde swa mycel to gode into þ mynstre of burh on golde 7 on seolfe 7 on scrud 7

on lande. swa nefre nan oðre ne dyde toforen him ne nan æfter him. Ða wearð gildene burh to wrecce burh. Ða cusen þa munecas to abbot Brand prouost. forðan þ he wæs swiðe god man 7 swiðe wis. 7 senden him þa to Ædgar æðeling. forðan þet þe land folc wendon þ he sceolde cyng wurðen. 7 se æðeling hit him geatte þa bliþolice. Ða þe cyng Willelm geherde þ secgen. þa wearð he swiðe wrað. 7 sæde þ se abbot him heafde forsegon. Ða eodon gode men heom betwene 7 sahtloden heom forðan þ se abbot wæs goddera manne. Geaf þa þone cyng ·xl· marc goldes to sahtnyesse. 7 þa lifede he litle hwile þær æfter buton þry gear. Syððon comen ealle dræuednysse 7 ealle ifele to þone mynstre. God hit gemyltse (Plummer 1: 198-199).

[In his day the abbey of Peterborough enjoyed complete happiness and prosperity, and he was beloved by everybody [...]. More than any man before or since he enriched the abbey of Peterborough with gold and silver, with vestments and land. Then 'Golden Borough' became 'Wretched Borough.' The monks chose Brand the provost as abbot because he was a very good and wise man: they sent him to prince Edgar because the people of that district thought he ought to be king, and the prince gladly consented to Brand's election. When king William heard of it, he was very angry, and said that the abbot had slighted him. By the intervention of good men, they were reconciled, because the abbot was a virtuous man. He gave the king forty marks of gold in reconciliation, and lived for but a short time thereafter, for only three years. Thereafter all manner of calamities and evils befell the monastery. God have mercy upon it (Garmonsway 198-199)].

CHAPTER 4

THE SECOND DESTRUCTION AND REBUILDING, AND PETERBOROUGH'S SUBSEQUENT HISTORY TO THE PRESENT DAY

The Second Destruction of the Monastery

The death of Leofric and the invasion of William the Conqueror marked the start of many trying years for the monastery. As noted previously, the 1066 annal mourns the loss of Leofric and calls his death the beginning of a “wrecce” [*wretched*] time in Peterborough’s history. The political reordering by the conquering Normans “was not trouble-free” for the monastery (Greenall 29), to which the annals from 1066-1069 testify. According to Mackreth, the story given in *E* is very close to the historical record. The monastery had initial difficulty with King William when, in 1066 after Leofric’s death, they chose a new abbot, Brand, with the blessing of the Saxon prince Edgar. Of course William was pleased with neither Edgar’s endorsement, nor with the monks’ choice, nor with whom they went to for approval (evidence indeed of Peterborough’s loyalty to Anglo-Saxon England over the Norman invaders). To reconcile with the King, the monastery paid him 40 gold marcs in restitution, and they were allowed to keep Brand as abbot.

Brand died, however, only three years later, leaving the monastery without an abbot when the Danes, led by King Swein, invaded again in 1069. Many of the Anglo-Saxons in the Peterborough area rallied around the Danes rather than the Normans, for Swein “was expected to gain the English crown” (Hart, *Danelaw* 627). To subdue Peterborough and its environs, William appointed Turolde as its abbot. Turolde, formerly an “abbot of Malmesbury,” was “reputedly a ferocious man” and one whom William sent to the monastery “because of his military qualities”

(Hart, *Danelaw* 628; Mackreth 20; Plummer 2:265). The monks were warned in advance that Hereward was going to raid Peterborough, so they sent their sacristan Ivar to warn Tuold, who was on his way; Ivar took with him as much as he could carry of the monastery's treasures. Just before Tuold arrived, however, Hereward and his followers from the nearby fens and woods raided the abbey. The monks resisted, so the raiders gained entry by burning down Bolhithe Gate. As their intent was not to harm the monks but to save the church's possessions from invaders, they took Peterborough's treasures and burned everything but the church, transporting their plunder to Ely, a fen monastery not under Norman control, for safekeeping (Hart 624). Tuold arrived to find "forbærnd wiðinnan 7 wiþutan. eall butan þa cyrece ane" [*everything inside and out destroyed by fire: only the church was left standing*]. The outlaws were already out to sea. Bishop Æthelric excommunicated all who "þ yfel dæde hæfden don" [*had done that evil deed*] (Plummer 1: 207; Garmonsway 207). Though Swein and William were reconciled shortly, Hereward and his followers continued to resist William. Hart calls the plundering of Peterborough abbey "an audacious and spectacularly successful operation, carried out under the noses of what must have been a greatly superior force, the raiders taking full advantage of their local knowledge of the treacherous swamps and waterways of the fens to secure their retreat" (*Danelaw* 629-630). For his patriotic efforts against the Normans, Hereward became an heroic figure in local folklore.

Plummer describes Hereward as a man who "evidently regarded a monastery under a Norman abbot as part of the enemy's country" (2: 265). Indeed, when they came to Peterborough, "Hereward's companions told the monks that their raid was carried out as an act of loyalty towards the monastery, to prevent all its valuables falling into the hands of the Normans" (Hart, *Danelaw* 628). Hart offers an illuminating context for Hereward's actions,

commenting that when William chose a new abbot for Peterborough after Brand's death, "he is said to have remarked that since Turolde behaved more like a soldier than a monk, he would provide him with somebody to fight." He also gave him an army, which was unusual, for "an abbot did not normally present himself at his new monastery with a retinue of 160 knights." Hart further clarifies that "their purpose, however, was not solely to effect the installation of an unpopular abbot," for "no sooner had Turolde taken up the reins of office, than he settled sixty of his knights on the abbey lands, displacing their English predecessors." Hart adds additionally that

It is still not generally appreciated that this imposition of knight service upon the lands of Peterborough Abbey was the very first step in a process which was to transform the face of England, impressing upon it the stamp of Norman rule. Nor was the Conqueror's choice of Peterborough as the site for the introduction of this famous constitutional development due to mere chance; it was provoked by the support given throughout the Danelaw to the northern uprising which followed Swein's arrival at the mouth of the Humber. The revolutionary nature of William's reprisal is a measure of the peril with which he was faced. As soon as the opportunity permitted, he extended the process to the lands of Ely and Bury St Edmunds. Not for nothing did these three abbeys carry an imposition of knight service almost equalling the demands made on all the rest of the English abbeys put together. By settling their lands with Norman knights, he separated by a loyal and locally established military force the Eastern from the Northern Danelaw.

Hereward and his followers "stood to lose everything by William's move." The coming Norman rule would displace them from their lands, leased from the fenland monasteries. Thus, "the

sacking of Peterborough which heralded this revolt was no wanton act of vandalism. The church itself was specifically spared from destruction [...] and] none of the Peterborough monks was harmed during the sack of the abbey [...] Hereward's quarrel was not with the monks of the pre-Conquest foundation, who had been his landlords, but with the Norman usurpers of the abbey estates" (Hart, *Danelaw* 647-648).

Peterborough was not the only monastery that suffered because of a Norman abbot. According to *E*, in 1083 the monks at Glastonbury were terrorized by their Norman abbot, Thurston, when they tried to maintain their traditional chanting (Plummer 2: 271). Garmonsway adds, quoting from Dom David Knowles' *The Monastic Order in England*, that

the monks of Glastonbury, a stronghold of tradition, were probably not a body of men easy to handle ... an *impasse* was finally reached over a question of ceremonies and chant, the abbot insisting on the substitution of the methods of the Dijon school for the Gregorian tradition of which Glastonbury claimed to be inheritor (214).

The presentation of this episode in *E* reveals the scribe's sympathy for the monks and his antipathy for the Norman abbot. He represents the monks as fair-minded and calm and the abbot as despotic and cruel, characterizing the monks' initial complaint about the matter as "lufelice" [*amicable*], and adding that the monks "beadon hine þ he sceolde healdan hi rihtlice. 7 lufan hi. 7 hi woldon him beon holde. 7 gehyrsume" [*asked him to rule them justly and have regard for them, and in return they would be faithful and obedient to him*]. Despite their reasonable request, "se abbot nolde þæs naht. ac dyde heom yfele. 7 beheot heom wyr. Anes dæges þe abbot eode into capitulan. 7 spræc uppon þa munecas. 7 wolde hi mistukian" [*the abbot, however, would have none of it, but treated them badly, threatening them with worse. One day the abbot went*

into chapter and spoke against the monks, and threatened to maltreat them]. The description of the bloody scene that follows is tragic and disturbingly vivid:

[The abbot] sende æfter læwede mannum. 7 hi comon into capitulan on uppon þa munecas full gewepnede. 7 þa wæron þa munecas swiðe aferede of heom. nyston hwet heom to donne wære. Ac to scuton. sume urnon into cyrcean. 7 belucan þa duran into heom. 7 hi ferdon æfter heom into þam mynstre. 7 woldon hig utdragan. þaða hig ne dorsten na utgan. Ac reowlic þing þær gelamp on dæg. þ þa Frencisce men bræcen þone chor 7 tofædon towærd þam weofode þær ða munecas wæron. 7 sume of ðam cnihtan ferdon uppon þone uppflore. 7 scotedon adunweard mid arewan toward þam halig dome. swa þ on þære rode þe stod bufon þam weofode sticodon on mænige arewan. 7 þa wreccan munecas lagon on buton þam weofode. 7 sume crupon under. 7 gyrne cleopedon to Gode his miltse biddende. Ða þa hi ne mihton nane miltse æt mannum begytan. Hwæt magon we secgean. buton þ hi scotedon swiðe. 7 þa oðre ða dura bræcon þær adune 7 eodon inn. 7 ofslogon sume þa munecas to deaðe. 7 mænige gewundedon þær inne. swa þ ðet blod com of ðam weofode uppon þam gradan. 7 of ðam gradan on þa flore. þreo þær wæron ofslagene to deaðe. 7 eahteteone gewundade (Plummer 1: 214-215).⁹

[[The abbot] sent for laymen, who entered the chapter fully armed against the monks. Not knowing what they should do, the monks were terrified of them and fled in all directions. Some ran into the church and locked the doors against them, but their pursuers went after them into the monastic church, determined to drag them out since they were afraid to leave. Moreover a pitiful thing took place there

that day, when the Frenchmen broke into the choir and began pelting the monks in the direction of the altar where they were. Some of the men-at-arms climbed up to the gallery, and shot arrows down into the sanctuary, so that many arrows stuck in the cross which stood above the altar. The wretched monks lay round about the altar and some crept underneath, crying aloud to God, desperately imploring His mercy when none was forthcoming from men. What more can we find to say except to add that they showered arrows, and their companions broke down the doors to force an entrance, and struck down and killed some of the monks, wounding many therein, so that their blood ran down from the altar on to the steps, and from the steps on to the floor. Three of the monks were done to death and eighteen wounded (Garmonsway 215)].

Some of the most striking images in this passage are the arrow-pierced cross, the blood of the monks running down the altar and onto the floor, and the Frenchmen (it is essential to the spirit of this episode's recounting that the scribe identify their nationality) raining arrows down on the huddled, terrified monks. Such an evocative passage reinforces existing hatred for the Normans and is especially effective since it is written by a monk about fellow monks, all abused by the French.

Here, just as in other passages where Peterborough Abbey is pillaged, plundered, and burnt, and its monks terrorized, scattered, and sometimes captured, the scribe demonstrates how the church itself has become a battleground, no longer sacrosanct. The Glastonbury monks barricaded themselves in the church, expecting refuge; instead, French laymen burst through the doors and attacked and slaughtered the monks on consecrated ground. In this way, then, Hereward and his followers, though ostensibly defending their land and churches against the

invading Normans, are no less responsible for defiling and debasing sacred places and relics than the pagan Vikings, who destroyed numerous churches in their raids, or than William, who fought for control of the English churches to more firmly establish his rule.

In 1086, King William died at Normandy, and the annal for this year includes a rather lengthy elegy for him. Though in this elegy the scribe often criticizes William, he does praise his monastic reforms after a passage about William's cruel deeds, noting just after that:

Ðas þing we habbað be him gewritene. ægðer ge gode ge yfele. þ þa godan men niman æfter þeora godnesse. 7 for leon mid ealle yfelnesse. 7 gan on ðone weg. þe us lett to heofonan rice (Plummer 1: 221).

[We have set down these things about him, both the good and the evil, so that men may cherish the good and utterly eschew the evil, and follow the path that leads us to the Kingdom of Heaven (Garmonsway 221)].

After William's son William becomes King, he gave gifts from the royal treasury to the monasteries and churches throughout England. The 1093 annal records that William fell ill and made many promises to God to "his agen lif on riht to lædene. 7 Godes cyrcean griðian 7 friðian. 7 næfre ma eft wið feo gesyllan. 7 ealle rihte lage on his þeode to habbene" *[lead his own life righteously, and to grant peace and protection to God's churches and never again to sell them for money, and to maintain all just laws amongst his people]* but then afterwards revoked all the land grants he gave and "ealle þa gode laga forlæt. þe he us ær behet" *[all the good laws which he had promised us earlier]* (Plummer 1: 227; Garmonsway 227). Annal 1097 records abbot Turolde's death and annal 1100 records the death of William of Normandy's son William, with a similar elegy for him as for his father, but instead of a balance of good and evil, the scribe finds William's son wholly repugnant.

Annal 1102 records a robbery at Peterborough perpetrated by foreigners, including the French:

On ðisum ylcan geare on Pentecosten mæssan wuce. þa coman þeofas sum of Aluearnie. sum of France. 7 sum of Flandres. 7 breokan þa mynstre of Burh 7 þær inne naman mycel to gode on golde 7 on seolfre. þet wæron roden 7 calicen 7 candel sticcan (Plummer 1: 238).

[In this same year in Whit week came thieves, some from Auvergne, others from France and Flanders, and broke into the monastery of Peterborough, and stole much of value in gold and silver, namely crosses, chalices and candlesticks (Garmonsway 238)].

In annal 1107, the scribe makes special mention of the number of years of French rule in England (forty-one) and notes that Peterborough has a new abbot: Earnulf. In 1114, however, King Henry forces Ernulf, abbot of Peterborough, to take his offer of the bishopric of Rochester (the King is supported in this by many royals and ecclesiastics), and though

he lange wiðstod. ac hit ne forheol naht. 7 se cyng þa bebed þone arc ̅ þ he sceolde him læden to Cantwarabyrig 7 blætson him to ̅ wolde he nolde he [...] Ða þe munecas of Burch hit herdon sægen. þa wæron hi swa sari swa hi næfre ær ne wæron. forþi þ he wæs swiðe god 7 softe man. 7 dyde mycel to gode wiðinnan 7 wiðutan. þa hwile þe he þær wunode. God ælmihtig wunie æfre mid him (Plummer 1: 245-246).

[Although [Ernulf] resisted for a long time, yet it was of no avail; and the king ordered the archbishop to lead him to Canterbury and consecrate him bishop willy nilly [...] When the monks of Peterborough heard the news, they had never

been so overcome with grief, for he was a very good and kind man, and did much good both inside and outside the monastery whilst he was there. May God Almighty ever dwell with him (Garmonsway 245-246)].

The King appoints John, a monk of Séez, as abbot of Peterborough in Earnulf's place. In 1116, Peterborough was again destroyed by fire, all "butan se Captelhus 7 se Slæpperne. 7 þær to eac bærnde eall þa mæste dæl of þa tuna. Eall þis belamp on an Frigdæg. þ wæs ·ii· N^o Aug't" [*except the chapter-house and the dormitory; in addition, most of the town was also completely burned down. All this happened on 4 August, which was a Friday*] (Plummer 1: 247; Garmonsway 247). In 1125, abbot John of Peterborough died.

An Unwanted Abbot: Henry of Poitou

The 1127-1132 annals of *E* relate the rather lengthy episode in Peterborough's history of abbot Henry of Poitou, a crafty ecclesiastic who tried through political and personal machinations to hold several abbacies and eventually attempted to subject the Peterborough monastery to the Clugny monastery. Finally in 1132 the King removed him from Peterborough and from Britain for good.

Annal 1127 first introduces Henry as he is asking for Peterborough's abbacy; he tells the King that he left his country because of strife and had the advice and permission from the pope in Rome to ask for Peterborough. The scribe comments that "oc hit ne wæs naðema eall swa. oc he wolde hauen baðe on hand. 7 swa hafde swa lange swa Godes wille wæs" [*this was true enough, but the reason was rather that he wished to have charge of both abbacies – which, in fact, he did succeed in doing as long as it was God's will*] (Plummer 1: 257; Garmonsway 257). The King grants his request, and what follows is the story of Henry's move to Peterborough:

Ðus earmlice wæs þone abbot rice gifen [...] þær he wunede eall right swa drane doð on hiue [...] swa dide he eall þ he mihte tacen wiðinnen 7 wiðuten of læred 7 of læwed swa he sende ouer sæ 7 na god þær ne dide. ne na god ðær ne læuede (Plummer 1: 258).

[Thus despicably was the abbacy bestowed [...] he took up his abode just as drones do in a hive [...] Everything that he could take, from within the monastery or outside it, from ecclesiastics and laymen, he sent oversea. He did nothing for the monastery's welfare and left nothing of value untouched (Garmonsway 258)].

To characterize Henry and his coming to Peterborough as portentous of an evil force, the scribe juxtaposes the medieval legend of the Wild Hunt and the time of Henry's arrival. The scribe introduces it as though it were an actual event, exploiting the strong folkloric tradition surrounding the woods and fens as a mysterious and cunning place:

Ne þince man na seillice þ we soð seggen for hit wæs ful cuð ofer eall land þ swa radlice swa he þær com þ wæs þes Sunendæies þ man singað EXURGE QUARE O. D. þa son þær æfter þa sægon 7 herdon fela men feole huntas huntas. Ða huntas wæron swarte 7 micela 7 ladlice. 7 here hundes ealle swarte 7 bradegede 7 ladlice. 7 hi ridone on swarte hors 7 on swarte bucces. Ðis wæs segon on þe selue derfald in þa tune on Burch 7 on ealle þa wudes ða wæron fram þa selua tune to Stanforde. 7 þa munecas herdon ða horn blawen þ hi blewen on nihtes. Soðfestemen heom kepten on nihtes. sæidon þes þe heom þuhte þ þær mihte wel ben abuton twenti oðer þritti horn blaweres. Ðis wæs sægon 7 herd fram þ he þider com eall þ lented tid on an to Eastren. Ðis was his ingang. of his utgang ne cunne we iett noht seggon. God scawe fore" (Plummer 1: 258).

[Let no one be surprised at the truth of what we are about to relate, for it was general knowledge throughout the whole country that immediately after his arrival – it was the Sunday when they sing Exurge Quare o[bdormis], D[omine]?¹⁰ – many men both saw and heard a great number of hunstmen hunting. The huntsmen were black, huge, and hideous, and rode on black horses and on black he-goats, and their hounds were jet black, with eyes like saucers, and horrible. This was seen in the very deer park of the town of Peterborough, and in all the woods that stretch from that same town to Stamford, and in the night the monks heard them sounding and winding their horns. Reliable witnesses who kept watch in the night declared that there might well have been as many as twenty or thirty of them winding their horns as near as they could tell. This was seen and heard from the time of his arrival all through Lent and right up to Easter. Such was his entrance: of his exit we cannot yet say. Let it be as God ordains! (Garmonsway 258)].

Thus, the scribe compares Henry of Poitou to the spectral huntsmen long associated with maleficence and fear. Interestingly, despite the detailed account of Henry's wrong against the monastery and the great lengths the scribe goes to in establishing his evil character, Cecily Clark notes that "no evidence extant of Abbot Henry's alleged depredations" exists (102).

In 1132, after he removed Henry of Poitou, the King gave the abbacy to Martin, a prior of St. Neot's. Abbot Martin, presiding over Peterborough from 1133-1155, dramatically changed the monastery's layout. He resituated the monastic gate, the market place, and the small town itself. Steane declares that "the modern layout of central Peterborough has been determined by the presence of the powerful monastery which dominated the little town growing up beneath and

outside its walls to the west” (Steane 147). Hart comments that the newly named Peterborough “very quickly thereafter [...] surpassed its former glory, for Æthelwold re-endowed it with the bulk of its early possessions, and many other estates besides” (Hart, “Peterborough” 243). The 1137 annal speaks very highly of abbot Martin, describing all that he did for Peterborough: took care of the monks’ needs, expanded the church’s holdings, retrieved some of its lost land, adorned and roofed the church, and changed the town’s position to a better one; overall, he “wæs god munec 7 god man. 7 foriþi him luueden God 7 gode men” [*was a good monk and a good man, and therefore he was loved by God and by good men*] (Plummer 1: 265; Garmonsway 265).

End of the Peterborough Chronicle

After Martin’s death in 1154, the monks elected William de Waterville as their new abbot, characterizing him as a “god clerc 7 god man” [*a learned man and good*] who was “wæl luued of þe kinge 7 of alle gode men“ [*well loved by the king and by all good men*]. He was consecrated at Lincoln and received

[mid mic]el [wurtscipe at] Burch, mid [mice]l processiu. 7 sua he was alsua at Ramesæie. 7 at Torn’. 7 at ... 7 Spall’ 7 at S. l. beres. 7 7 [nu is] abbot. 7 fa[ir] hauled begunnon. Xpus him un[ne]”¹¹ (Plummer 1: 268-269).

[with great ceremony at Peterborough and with solemn procession. he was received likewise at Ramsey, and at Thorney, and at Crowland and Spalding, and at St Albans, and [?] and is now abbot, and has made a good beginning. Christ grant that he may end as well!] (Garmonsway 268-269)].

Thus ends the Peterborough narrative, leaving the monastery with prosperity, two well-loved abbots in succession, and hopeful prospects.

Peterborough in the Late Medieval Era

After 1069, Peterborough was not destroyed again. In fact, the Domesday survey “portrays Northamptonshire as a rich and fertile country fast recovering from the depredations of the 1060s” (Greenall 31). The Peterborough area seems to have maintained its economic success, with manor values increasing fourfold (31) and the population swelling from 30,000 to 104,000 between the 1080s and about 1300 (32). This briskly-growing population needed a place to live, as evidenced by the rapid land settlement in this same period. While “all the first- and second-quality land in Northamptonshire had been settled” by 1086 (31), “by 1300 all the third quality and marginal land had been settled.” Indeed, “more than half of the new settlements were in the fen around Peterborough” (33). The land possessions of Peterborough were mostly comprised of fen, swamp, and woodland. In fact, “Peterborough Abbey possessed lands in the most densely wooded part of the country” (Steane 106). These holdings were gradually converted to usable land. The forests were cleared and readied for cultivation, available then for farmers to take tenancy and rent the land from the monastery. The “reclamation of the fens was almost entirely for the sake of rich pastures,” which again could be rented from the monastery. Even unreclaimed, the fens were, according to Hugh Candidus, a rich source of raw resources like wood and firewood, hay, reed, water, fish and fowl (111-112).

After this boom, though, the economy plunged and stagnated in 1350 and floundered for many years. Greenall points to over-population, over-cropping, a “prolonged sequence of harvest failures and famines which in turn exposed the population to epidemics and outbreaks of pestilence” like the Bubonic plague of 1348-1350, when the population dropped by as much as 40 percent (Greenall 32), and a “worsening of the climate in the 14th century” as the culprits. All of this resulted in “a marked contraction of population, land under the plough, and economic

activity” (Greenall 33). Many villages, hamlets, and smaller market towns became deserted. Due to the new scarcity of labor, manorial lords commonly agreed to leases, copyholding, and monetary payments instead of feudal services and tenures (34). This change in economics became permanent and eventually the feudal system completely disintegrated.

Modern Peterborough

The “crucial influence the abbey had on the landscape within the forests and fens of its vast endowed estates” (Steane 120) was especially important for shaping the town’s structure and providing farmland for tenants and rich natural resources for the area. The Reformation, breakdown of the feudal system, subsequent economic restructuring, industrialization and modernization of the area are integrally linked to the monastery, its holdings and its influence. Additionally, the Danish influence introduced much earlier, in the eighth century, had a powerful and lasting effect on Northamptonshire. Hart comments that

what impresses one most about the Danelaw is the strength and longevity of its institutions [...] The body of customary law which the Vikings introduced to regulate their rural and urban way of life in the settlement areas persisted largely unchanged, against all odds, for two centuries. Remnants of these customs have survived to influence English society down to the present day (Hart, *Danelaw* 23).

Although Peterborough and its county of Northamptonshire are no longer political entities separate from the rest of England, their traditions survive. From its inception, Medeshamstede and later Peterborough have provided an economic strength and an impetus for growth that the otherwise remote fenland area might not have had.

The fenlands are still a mysterious place. Their peat bogs yield ghostly petrified natural relics and well-preserved artifacts from long-perished civilizations. The dwellers within “still preserve some of their traditional insular, volatile, and independent identity,” the landscape is dotted with monastic ruins and deserted medieval villages, and the region retains much of its unique character: “being insulated by the sea to the north and east and lying just far enough from London and the main north-south national routeways, East Anglia has been able to escape the full blast of the forces of centralised uniformity which have suffocated the provincial cultures of some southern and Midlands counties” (Ravensdale and Muir 12-14). Though East Anglia does not offer the glamor of London or the scenery of Cornwall, its “bold and gutsy character” makes it nonetheless a memorable place (203). Just as memorable is the rich written tradition of the *Peterborough Chronicle*, deeply permeated with fenland mystery and the independent nature of the inhabitants whose lives it records.

NOTES

¹ Many scholars contend that *Beowulf* has East Anglian origins. For a further discussion of this matter, see Sam Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993.

² See Head, chapter two, “Sources” (especially pages 17-18).

³ I have not had the opportunity to work directly with the manuscript but believe that this thesis would not be complete without a description of the work that it is based upon and seeks to illuminate. Thus, for a description of MS. *E* (Laud Misc. 636), I rely on Plummer’s authoritative account:

Laud Misc. 636 (*E*). ff. 91. Vellum, small folio, 21.0 × 14.0. The leaves vary a little in size, but this is the average. Five leaves, ff. 86-90, are of a larger size, measuring 24.2 × 16.0, and this was probably the original size of the MS. These five leaves have escaped the binder's shears because on the margin of them is written a brief French Chronicle from Brutus to Edward I. The MS. has been interleaved with large folio paper, and both on the vellum and on the interleaved paper are copious notes by William Lisle (†1637) chiefly consisting of collations from \bar{A} , which he calls ‘Benet.’ And on the blank paper leaves at the end he has inserted from \bar{A} the annals 894-924, 937, 941, 962, 973, 975, and a pedigree of Woden from 855 B. On 937 (the *Song of Brunanburh*) he says: ‘This is mysticall and written in a poeticall vaine obscurely of purpose to avoide the daunger of those tymes and needes decyphring.’ On 941 he writes ‘this also mysticall;’ 975

‘And this.’ Some notes in earlier hands occur here and there; one at 705 may be by Joscelin; another at 893 refers to R. Talbot and may be by him. In many passages the MS. is underlined in red in a manner closely resembling Archbishop Parker’s underlinings of MS. \bar{A} . And it is quite likely that these marks are by him. E must certainly have been in the hands of his secretary Joscelin, who makes so many extracts from it in other MSS. (2: xxxiv-xxxv).

⁴ See, for example, Donald Mackreth’s *Peterborough*, G. N. Garmonsway’s introduction to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and Earle and Plummer’s *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, volume 2 (Introduction, Notes, and Index).

⁵ This is of course the same event narrated in *The Battle of Brunanburh*; both it and *The Battle of Maldon* are the two most famous battle poems in Old English.

⁶ Plummer lists these as being 654, 656, 675, 686, 777, 852, 963, 1013, 1041, 1052, 1066, 1069, 1070, 1072, 1098, 1102, 1103, 1107, 1114, 1115, 1116, 1124, 1125, 1127, 1128, 1130, 1131, 1132, 1137, and 1154, adding that “there is a tiny Peterborough addition in 992” (2: xlv).

⁷ Plummer indicates this contraction with a tilde over the “c”; I, however, not having this character available, have substituted a “c̃” and have done the same in all similar instances in this and other passages.

⁸ Plummer refers to Earle, who offers this explanation in his own edition: “The wood and [bundles of branches] may well have been wanted for repairing the dykes in the fens” (2: 79).

⁹ I have included the entire passage, though lengthy, because neither a paraphrase nor a summary would capture the vivid images here and fully convey the degree of strife between the Saxon monks and the Norman abbot.

¹⁰ These lines are part of the introit (first variable part of the mass) for Sexagesima Sunday, the second Sunday before Lent (Clark 102).

¹¹ Plummer notes here that “the MS. at this point is both mutilated and defaced. The words in brackets are more or less conjectural” (1: 269).

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