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Diplomatic Solutions: Land Use in Anglo-Saxon Worcestershire

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DIPLOMATIC SOLUTIONS:
LAND USE IN ANGLO-SAXON WORCESTERSHIRE

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THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation is a study of the charters of the Worcester diocese from its foundation in approximately 680 to the tenth century. Bishops of Worcester, men in control of one of the wealthiest sees in Anglo-Saxon England, used charters to acquire land, obtain rights and privileges for their existing estates, and manage trade within limits imposed by the king. Rights associated with bookland, land held by charter, gave bishops and their agents the ability to direct settlement and field systems in order to maximize estate productivity and encourage trade through a system of urban and rural marketing of timber, salt, surplus foodstuffs, and other commodities. To isolate these processes, I study two aspects of charters from the Worcester archive. First, charters are responses to major political developments such as Viking invasions or the transition from Hwiccian to Mercian to West Saxon rule. Second, charters are legal instruments used to exert control over local land use and market conditions. Charters read from these perspectives enrich scholarship in a number of fields including political history, geography, archaeology, and textual studies. Charters written, copied, and archived by the religious community of Worcester linked all levels of Anglo-Saxons from the bishops and kings mentioned by name in the documents to the ordinary clerics, monks, and layfolk who managed and worked the land in ways that enrich our understanding of their daily lives.
INTRODUCTION

Old English sources say little about how land was managed and used. When I received my first teaching assignment for a class on Old English literature, the first text I assigned was Ælfric’s *Colloquy*, a conversation manual used by Anglo-Saxons to teach Latin.¹ The Old English version, adapted from glosses in the manuscript, served a similar purpose for my class. The text gave my students their first glimpse of the Old English language and Anglo-Saxon everyday life. The *Colloquy* describes familiar activities—mentions of hunting and fishing were particularly relatable to undergraduates in Oklahoma. The ploughman, oxherd, and fisherman describe their day’s work, along with the baker, the smith, the merchant, and the leatherworker. The *Colloquy* is a rare example of daily labor and commerce in Old English literature “persistently more idealistic than realistic” (Hines 55). As Allen J. Frantzen points out, “The more extraordinary the text – *Beowulf*, for example, or Wulfstan’s *Sermon of the Wolf to the English* – the less likely it is to refer to daily life in any but hyperbolic terms” (*Food, Eating and Identity* 9). As a scholar trained in literary studies pursuing evidence of land use, trade networks, and peasant labor, I look beyond poetry, homilies, and saint’s lives to charters.

Charters, sometimes called diplomas, encompass a wide range of Anglo-Saxon legal documents including grants of land, leases, wills, writs, and synodal

¹ See G.N. Garmonsway, Ælfric’s *Colloquy*. 
pronouncements (Keynes "Charters and Writs" 99-100). Old English sources refer to charters as *boc* or *carta* (*DOE*), and they are preserved in two forms: on single sheets of parchment, *acta*, and in cartularies, *cartularium.*

Single-sheet charters are original documents composed at the time of the transaction or soon after. Cartularies contain copies of many charters bound together in a book and were typically produced years or centuries later. These documents are staunchly formulaic, but the details of the grants themselves, called the dispositive clause, and the description of the property line of the estate, called the boundary clause, are rich in data.

Charters are a point of contact for all levels of Anglo-Saxon society recording data on those who controlled, managed and worked the land. In this dissertation, I read charters in two directions: up to the institutional mechanisms of bishops and kings that drove land use and trade; and down to the consequences of those systems for peasants on the ground.

Scholars who investigate the lives of those of lower status often frame their work as an investigation of “daily life.” Frantzen describes how this type of inquiry is “now disdained because it has so often been both insufficiently specialized and undertheorized” (*Food, Eating and Identity* 3). Frantzen points to characterizations and stereotypes of the Anglo-Saxons based on modern conceptions of identity and culture that permeate early attempts to assess Anglo-Saxon daily life. Sally

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2 For a full description of documents classified as charters, see Simon Keynes, “Charters and Writs” (99-100).

3 For a summary of charter formulas, see Sir Frank Stenton, *The Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period* (31-40).

Crawford’s *Daily Life in Anglo-Saxon England* overcomes many of the deficiencies of early attempts and demonstrates what can be achieved through close analysis of archaeological and documentary sources to illustrate the everyday and familiar comings and goings of ordinary people. However, she points out that “any researcher attempting to reconstruct Anglo-Saxon society is aware that they are only offering a best-fit version of the past;” we present a picture that fits the available evidence (xi-xii).

In this dissertation, I investigate what charters can teach us about daily life. Needless to say, charter evidence does not allow for a full reconstruction of the daily lives of Anglo-Saxons. However, my method for reading charters yields glimpses of where peasants lived and how they worked. I do this by first establishing economic and political conditions that influence peasant life. Charters establish boundaries of estates and the types of land use permitted to occur there. An individual charter directly speaks to the activities of those enjoyed elite status. Bishops used charters to acquire estates and increase their profitability within limits established by the king. Clerics and laborers lived and worked on these estates and were subject to the systems operating above them. The explicit terms of charters open a door to implicit conditions on the ground at estates through place-names, references to roads and tolls, food rents, and commodities like timber and salt. Charters are a large body of texts with over 1500 extant documents. My method of close reading benefits from a regional focus that isolates part of the corpus to offer a more manageable group of texts.
I focus on the charters of a single religious house—the cathedral community at Worcester. The Worcester archive is comprised of 244 distinct charters that embrace a variety of diplomatic forms, including royal diplomas, writs, wills, and ecclesiastical charters issued by the bishop. A small number of texts survive on single sheets of parchment but most are eleventh century copies preserved in a single manuscript. Charters can be grouped according to various criteria, but the most influential studies of charter collections have focused on the charters of individual religious houses. Simon Keynes states that whatever the historical significance of individual grants, “their value as evidence transforms when charters are studied collectively” ("Charters and Writs" 99-100). The earliest project to adopt this approach was Frederic Maitland’s 1897 study of seigniorial jurisdiction. Nicholas Brooks’ 1984 close study of the charter archives of Christ Church, Canterbury demonstrated how charters collectively narrate the rises and declines of Canterbury in the late eighth and ninth centuries. For a study of local power structures and daily life, a regional focus is necessary for two reasons. First, charters and groups of charters tended to reflect the needs and interests of the ecclesiastical and secular elites who issued them in the first place, and who later collected,

5 For a summary of the form and arrangement of the extant charters of Worcester, see Keynes, “Worcester.”

6 BL Cotton Tiberius A.xiii. The manuscript is generally known as Hemming’s Cartulary but has long been recognized as two distinct cartularies. See N.R. Ker, “Hemming’s Cartulary: A Description of the Two Worcester Cartularies in Cotton Tiberius A. XIII.”


8 See Brooks, The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066.
selected, and reissued them in cartularies. The charters of a bishop or king record their plans for land use and trade. We can trace the results of those plans to successive elites to view how political conditions and land use changed over time. Second, individual estates had economic relationships with other estates and ecclesiastical emporia that only come into view when a charter is studied in relation to its local trade network.

I focus on land use in the Worcester diocese in particular because of its robust archive of charters that record diverse estates and landscapes. The diocese, located in the West Midlands, was founded in 680 to serve an area that covers modern Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, and Warwickshire. The cathedral city of Worcester was a rich and thriving settlement with a well-managed rural hinterland for most of its history. The Church acquired a substantial endowment and its bishops used charters to meticulously manage its assets. The Worcester archive preserved the largest number of charters from any religious house; these charters survived in manuscripts that present a number of textual challenges. Of the over 130 original single sheet charters that survived into the Early Modern period, only

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9 For comments on the benefits of a regional approach focused on a single archive, See Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready': 978-1016* (6-7).

10 For comments on ecclesiastical emporia and trade, see John Blair, “Minster Churches and the Landscape” (38).

11 For a succinct account of the foundation of the Worcester diocese, see A.E.E Jones, *Anglo-Saxon Worcester* (47-51).

12 Worcester preserves 244 charters. Most archives comprise between 10 and 60 documents, and among the “major” archives, only Winchester also preserves over 200 (Keynes "Archives").
twenty-four are extant (Keynes "Anglo-Saxon Charters" 57-8).\textsuperscript{13} Most charters from Worcester are preserved in BL Cotton Tiberius A. xiii, a complex manuscript that comprises two distinct cartularies: \textit{Liber Wigornensis (LW)}, compiled in the early eleventh century; and Hemming's cartulary, compiled towards the close of the eleventh century.\textsuperscript{14} A third, fragmentary cartulary contains many of the same charters as the two large collections.\textsuperscript{15} Cartularies record only a fraction of the charters the Worcester diocese would have accumulated over several centuries. The charters that were selected to be copied served a function for the compilers at the time the cartularies were put together. These copies could be used to maintain estates or claim new privileges. Thus, cartularies are only a partial record of the church of Worcester's estates, a textual reality that places limits on my reconstruction of political and economic conditions.

For a project centered on local contexts for charters, it is important to speak to the relationship of the surviving text to its, most often lost, original. Fabrications of entire charters are rare but copies often have forged elements that depart from original documents.\textsuperscript{16} These changes include scribal errors, updated place-names,

\textsuperscript{13} Keynes offers an account of the loss, destruction and sale of a number of these single-sheet charters by 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} century antiquarians. See “Anglo-Saxon Charters” (57-8).

\textsuperscript{14} See N.R. Ker, “Hemming’s Cartulary: A Description of the Two Worcester Cartularies in Cotton Tiberius A. XIII.”

\textsuperscript{15} The name Nero-Middleton Cartulary is the most common designation for this fragmentary cartulary. It is also referenced in scholarship as “The Cartulary of St. Oswald” or “St. Wulfstan’s Cartulary” based on arguments over its date of composition. See N.R. Ker, \textit{Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon} and W.H. Stevenson, \textit{Report on the Manuscripts of Lord Middleton}.
and altered boundaries or other changes to features that might benefit the diocese.
P.H. Sawyer records a broad range of opinions on authenticity for many charters.\textsuperscript{17} The evaluation of charter copies for authenticity, called diplomatic, dominates charter scholarship. Opinions on authenticity can vary widely. H.P.R. Finberg initiated a lenient standard of criticism in the 1960s to resist what he felt was an overly cautious approach by earlier scholars (\textit{West Midlands} 14).\textsuperscript{18} More recently, Anton Scharer speaks from the longstanding German and Austrian tradition of diplomatic characterized by cautious estimates of authenticity.\textsuperscript{19} The variance in judgment on authenticity can be explained in part by the absence of a manual of diplomatic like those used by scholars of continental charters (Brooks "Anglo-Saxon Charters" 184).\textsuperscript{20} However, a dominant vocabulary to organize charters emerged from Pierre Chaplais’ terms: original, apparent original, copy, and forgery.\textsuperscript{21} While these terms greatly helped to structure commentary on authenticity, they also imposed a hierarchal structure that privileged original and apparent original

\textsuperscript{16} For recent articles on charter forgeries, see Keynes, "Anglo-Saxon Charters: Lost and Found” and Francesca Tinti, “The Reuse of Charters at Worcester Between the Eighth and the Eleventh Century: A Case-Study.”

\textsuperscript{17} This dissertation uses \textit{The Electronic Sawyer} (Ed. Susan Kelly), an updated electronic edition of Sawyer’s \textit{Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography}. I follow the standard practice of referencing charters using Sawyer’s numbering system (e.g. S 101)

\textsuperscript{18} See H.P.R. Finberg, The Early Charters of the West Midlands and \textit{Lucerna: Studies of Some Problems in the Early History of England}.

\textsuperscript{19} See Anton Scharer, \textit{Die Angelsächsische Königsurkunde}.


\textsuperscript{21} See Chaplais, "The Origin and Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diploma" (48-54).
charters in ways that obscured how copies and forgeries functioned when they were written, a point I take up in chapter 1.

Studies on conditions of production, law, and regnal style inform local contexts for charters. On conditions of production, Simon Keynes argues that many charters were written in royal chanceries, a view that challenges the prevailing opinion, championed by Pierre Chaplais, that most charters were produced in ecclesiastical scriptoria. Concerning legal contexts, Patrick Wormald explained that charters often present a partisan account of events from the perspective of only one of the participants in a dispute. Alan Kennedy has since articulated the role of shire courts in land disputes. Alan Thacker analyzed the regnal styles West Saxon, Mercian, and Kentish kings through comparative analysis of terms for Anglo-Saxon nobles. Specific to Worcester, Patrick Sims-Williams and Francesca Tinti have both assessed developments in ecclesiastical power in the Worcester diocese. Andrew Wareham examined the fortunes of kinsmen of Bishop Oswald of Worcester from charter evidence. These studies reflect the dominant mode of scholarly inquiry for

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22 See Simon Keynes, The Diplomas of King Æthelred the Unready and P. Chaplais, “The Anglo-Saxon Chancery: from the Diploma to the Writ.”

23 See Wormald, “Charters, Law and the Settlement of Disputes in Anglo-Saxon England” (149-68) and The Making of English Law.

24 See Alan Kennedy, Law and Litigation in the Libellus Æthelwoldi Episcopi.


26 See Sims-Williams, Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800 and Tinti, Sustaining Belief: the Church of Worcester from c.870-c.1100.

27 See Wareham, “St Oswald’s Family and Kin.”
Anglo-Saxon charters: a focus on relationships between elite status individuals. An understanding of law and political developments is crucial to the study of land use and daily life because relationships between elites set the agenda for how land was managed. However, to pursue what was happening on the ground, I also draw on scholarship that is more focused on life on the estates that charters address.

Work on boundary clauses has clarified the location of many estates recorded in charters. Major studies of the bounds of individual charters are numerous, but the most important work in this area began in the 1950s with T.R. Thompson’s seminal articles in *Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine* and the pioneering work of H.P.R. Finberg. They established the principles for the study and publication of topographical research based on charter bounds. An advantage of studying boundary clauses is that this section of charters facilitates analysis of an estate’s relationship to the surrounding countryside. For example, Julian Whybra maps estates in Winchcombeshire based on boundary clauses and plots them on regional maps to provide invaluable visualizations of the potential relationships between estates. Della Hooke’s work on the charter-bounds of Worcestershire, Devon, Cornwall and Warwickshire approximates maps of individual estates from boundary clauses, early county and Ordnance survey maps, and archaeological

28 Thompson and Finberg were the first to work through bounds in a systematic way to precisely locate estates. See Thompson, “The Early Bounds of Purton and a Pagan Sanctuary”; “The Bounds of Ellandune”; “The Early Bounds of Wanborough and Little Hinton.” For Finberg, see *The Early Charters of the West Midlands; The Early Charters of Wessex;* and *The Early Charters of Devon and Cornwall.*

29 See Whybra, *A Lost English County: Winchcombeshire in the 10th and 11th Centuries.*
evidence. Hooke’s *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: the Kingdom of the Hwicce* assesses commodities like salt and timber and the roads that carried them from the hinterland to trading centers like Worcester. Hooke’s work is a rare instance in scholarship on the West Midlands that carries a reading of charters from elite relationships all the way to the delivery of the resources the charter was structured to generate.

For other perspectives and evidence of local activity, I look to archaeology, a discipline that focuses on local evidence. In 1980, Martin Carver edited *Medieval Worcester: An Archaeological Framework*. This text brought together reports on excavations of Worcester Cathedral and the city’s Anglo-Saxon defenses. Sarah Watts’ reports of excavations at Saxon Lode Farm, Ripple reveal rural conditions of labor supported by charter evidence including fishing and dairy production. However, archaeological evidence cannot always be smoothly applied to textual evidence from charters. It is often difficult to connect animal bones to boundary clauses.

To connect the local contexts of archaeology and charters, I follow the documents from the scriptorium to the estate to illustrate how charters both direct and record daily life. The physical text resided in the cathedral archive or with a high status layman. For the illiterate, massive labor force that carried out the daily tasks at Worcester’s estates, the impact of these texts is felt in land use policies,


31 See Barber et al., *Excavations at Saxon’s Lode Farm, Ryall Quarry, Ripple 2001-2.*
shifting tenancy patterns, and taxation. Just as a boundary clause regulates the property line of an estate, a charter’s terms placed boundaries on the activities of peasants of various ranks. In the chapters that follow, I demonstrate how charters relate to the lives of all levels of Anglo-Saxon, high status and low, ecclesiastical and lay, through a reading that assesses the local implications for large events in the history of the Worcester diocese.

Chapter 1 frames my reading of charters in four parts. First, I analyze how the church adapted a charter’s formulaic structures to deliver messages of spiritual authority that underpin the transaction of the grant. Second, I discuss the role of charter copies within the administration of a religious house. As a late Anglo-Saxon phenomenon, cartularies were compilations of an abbey or cathedral community’s old charters. Bishops commissioned cartularies to more effectively account for the assets of the diocese; more than that, a cartulary represented an opportunity for bishops to claim new rights and privileges for land by updating old charters or sometimes forging new ones. Cartularies also had a ritual context as objects. For example, there is evidence a Worcester cartulary was bound in the bible of the cathedral, an object on display to the ecclesiastical and lay community. Next, I analyze more direct impacts of charters on the lives of lower status men and

32 See Sarah Foot, “Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters: Memory, Record, or Story?” for a discussion of charters as both legal instruments and ritual objects.

33 For a detailed study of one such forgery, see Nicholas Brooks, “The Michdelver Forgery” (239-74). Brooks offers paleographic, historical, and diplomatic analysis, along with an edition of the charter (S 360). He shows how the need to reassert traditional authority over land could motivate forged elements in charter copies.

34 See Simon Keynes, “Worcester.”
women. Peasants did not usually participate in meetings or councils that hammered out a charter’s terms but they lived the effects of grants that regulated farming and trade. Last, I investigate shared perspectives from my work on charters and archaeology that is skeptical of general and national explanations for developments in Anglo-Saxon culture and looks to the complexity of local conditions.\textsuperscript{35}

Chapter 2 traces how competition and rivalry manifest in Worcester’s charters in the early years of the diocese from its foundation in 680 through the reign of King Offa of Mercia (757-796). By royal grant, Worcester became an important and wealthy ecclesiastical and economic center. The Church of Worcester was equipped from its foundation to become the dominant institution in the region. The bishop was the lord of the city and its cathedral precincts, and most commercial activity, landed wealth, and defense were under the direct control of the church.\textsuperscript{36}

Early charters from the Worcester archive narrate this steady growth of wealth and influence achieved by the Worcester Diocese through the acquisition of once independent monasteries, tight regulation of land use and trade, and negotiations with kings not always sympathetic to the Church’s interests. The impacts of these events on daily life are found in changes to land use through new field systems and industrial scale production of salt and timber enacted by charter to direct trade towards Worcester.

\textsuperscript{35} See Christopher Loveluck for skepticism of “grand narratives” that persist in the field of archaeology and gloss over “local complexities” in favor of broad periods and national scales, “Changing Lifestyles, Interpretation of Settlement Character and Wider Perpectives” (19-20).

\textsuperscript{36} For the political authority of the bishop of Worcester as lord of the city, see Nigel Baker and Richard Holt, \textit{Urban Growth and the Medieval Church} (128).
In chapter 3, I explore how the bishops of Worcester expanded their authority under late Mercian kings and adapted to the emergence of a West Saxon political order. Strategies employed by the diocese under Kings Burgred (852-74) and Ceolwulf II (874-c.883) centered on relief from burdens of hospitality and other parts of the *feorm* (food, entertainment, and provisions) due to the king. Late Mercian kings were under tremendous pressure from Viking invasions and more than willing to grant privileges for the church of Worcester’s estates in exchange for quick cash to pay their troops, or more commonly pay off their enemies. The Mercian dynasty eventually succumbed to internal fractures and pressures from Viking occupation, which led to the ascension of Alfred of Wessex as king over all of the former Mercian territory. The fortification of Worcester and its subsequent urbanization in the late ninth century under West Saxon rule permanently altered the relationship between bishops of Worcester and the king. In exchange for the security of fortifications, Bishop Wærferth of Worcester (873-912) relinquished much of his authority to King Alfred of Wessex (849-99) and his proxies in Mercia, Ealdorman Æthelred and his wife Æthelflæd. Despite receding political control of the city of Worcester under West Saxon rule, Bishop Wærferth, and subsequent ecclesiastical leaders, established profitable trade agreements. By the tenth century, commerce and trade in the West Midlands were organized within proto-urban *burh* centers, fortified towns that combined defensive and commercial functions. Wærferth altered lease patterns, breaking up large self-sufficient estates into

37 For a summary of the Mercian response to the Viking *micel here* (“great raiding army”), see Ian Walker’s *Mercia and the Makings of England* (43-68).
smaller interdependent, specialized units that in some ways expanded opportunities for low status workers.

Chapter 4 describes how Bishop Oswald’s (972-992) economic reforms enacted through charters related to his efforts to reform monasticism. Oswald is identified as one of the three major figures in the Benedictine reform of the English church in the tenth century. Oswald founded new monasteries at Ramsey and in the city of Worcester; however, there is no evidence that he replaced clerics with monks in his churches as some hagiography suggests. Close analysis of his charters reveals Oswald to be a modest reformer of monasticism. The most significant reforms in the Worcester diocese under Oswald were economic. The number of ecclesiastical leases from Oswald’s episcopate far exceeded the number for any other Worcester bishop. Oswald’s eighty charters show that he implemented a dramatic restructuring of the church’s estates by parting off sections of his largest estates to clerics and laymen in his service. Clerics, monks, and lay workers gained a source of income through rents and access to the market at Worcester. From Oswald’s perspective, these leases were political; he was expanding his familia by putting estates under the control men he trusted who provided valuable labor and service to the diocese. Rural estate leases to wealthy laymen show that Oswald

38 The others are Archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury (960-78) and Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester (963-84). For a full account of the Benedictine reform in Anglo-Saxon England’s major dioceses, see Michael Lapidge, The Life of St Æthelwold and David Knowles, The Monastic Order in England; a History of its Development from the Times of St. Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 940-1216.

established a militarized network of high status thegns across the diocese who answered directly to the bishop and could be mobilized in his service.⁴⁰ Public dealings exchanging land, money, and favors seem far removed from the spiritual duties of a bishop, but I read Oswald’s expansion of the economic footprint of the diocese as a strategy to fund and protect his monastic foundations and ensure their future growth.

Chapter 5 explores how bishops used charters to direct the daily lives of peasants on estates they would rarely, or never, visit—peasants who lived their entire lives close to the fields where they worked.⁴¹ The first four chapters of this dissertation presented an ecclesiastical power base that negotiated with secular authority to maximize the profitability of their estates. Bishops and their agents used charters to develop a regional economy based in Worcester that reached into rural zones and had ties to London and other trading centers. Operating below these elite political mechanisms were the everyday comings and goings of peasant agricultural workers, craftsmen, swineherds, beekeepers, and all of the other laborers who generated wealth for the diocese. Charters address those who enjoyed elite status by name but peasants are rarely mentioned as individuals. Nevertheless,

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⁴⁰ For a recent account of Oswald’s lease program, see Vanessa King, “St Oswald’s Tenants” and Julia Barrow, “The Community of Worcester, 961-c.1100.”

⁴¹ There are few studies focused on peasant life in the Worcester diocese. Dyer’s first chapter of Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society covers settlement, land use, and trade from 680-1086 (7-38). See also “St Oswald and 10000 West Midland Peasants.” Hooke provides the most comprehensive account of land use and trade in the Worcester diocese in The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Kingdom of the Hwicce. See also her articles on commodities and travel: “The Droitwich Salt Industry: an Examination of the West Midland Charter Evidence” and “The Hinterlands and Routeways of Late Saxon Worcester: the Charter Evidence.”
charters can tell us a great deal about the daily lives or workers. Charters reveal settlement patterns, field systems, pasturing, and trade networks that encompassed peasant life.

Field systems, trade, and political rivalries among bishops and kings over privileges for ecclesiastical estates are distant from the themes of lordship, exile, and sanctity of most Old English literature. The poetry and homilies that comprise literary anthologies do not encourage us to think about the salt trade or marketing rights; however, the efforts of bishops through charters to maintain and expand their estates fostered the strong, largely independent churches across Anglo-Saxon England that copied and produced the literature of the period. In Worcester, charters reveal the administrative acts in the world of saints like Oswald or Wulfstan better known for their vitae or sermons. Worcester charters also intersect with the reigns of some of Anglo-Saxon England’s most powerful kings like Offa and Alfred, providing a local context for figures usually discussed in reference national or international events. The study of charters that follows aims to illustrate how documents from the Worcester archive recorded and directed life in the Worcester diocese at all levels from the bishop in his cathedral to the ploughman in his field.
CHAPTER 1

LOCAL FLOWS: CHARTERS, AUDIENCE, AND DAILY LIFE

Research on Anglo-Saxon charters in the last sixty years has focused on the conditions of their production, the development of their form, their authenticity, and some of the central concepts they document, including kingship and the history of religious institutions.1 These topics address important regional and national concerns.2 Charters also mediated land-based relationships between secular and ecclesiastical elites with local implications, and these aspects of their history are not yet fully understood. Charters offer, at varying levels, evidence of the creation and enforcement of ecclesiastical identity and power.3 The Worcester archive of charters, on which I focus, offers strong evidence for these processes, both because of its large number of texts and because of the stable ecclesiastical history of the Worcester diocese. This chapter frames an analysis of the Worcester archive with a

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1 For a review of scholarship on charters since 1953, see Nicholas Brooks, “Anglo-Saxon Charters: A Review of Work 1953-73; with a Postscript on the Period 1973-98.” See also Simon Keynes, “Anglo-Saxon Charters: Lost and Found” (45-66). Keynes identifies 1953 as a crucial year in charter studies because it marked the publication of a series of regional hand-lists by Leicester University Press (46). These editions, edited by H.P.R. Finberg and C.R. Hart, reawakened scholarly interest in charters and paved the way for landmark scholarship in the 1960s, including the publication of Peter Sawyer’s Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography in 1968. In reference to the Worcester diocese, see Finberg, The Early Charters of the West Midlands.

2 Seminal works on authenticity include Pierre Chaplais’ “The Origin and Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diploma” and Sir Frank Stenton’s The Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period (1-30). For work on kingship and religious history that makes significant use of charter evidence, see David Pratt, The Political Thought of King Alfred and Patrick Sims-Williams, Religion and Literature in Western England.

3 See Francesca Tinti, Sustaining Belief for analysis of charters as a record of ecclesiastical power structures in the Worcester diocese from the ninth to the twelfth century.
discussion of the audiences and local impacts of charters. I discuss elite secular and ecclesiastical individuals addressed directly in charters, the primary audience of the grants; later generations who came into contact with the charter after it was copied into a cartulary, a secondary audience; and lower status servants and estate workers whose labor was directed by reeve in accordance with the terms of a charters. I argue the lives of the men and women in these three groups were affected differently by both explicit and implicit messages that directed land use and asserted the vitality and permanence of the religious house that issued the grant.

In the spirit of much recent work on medieval archives of many kinds, I begin with an explanation of how charters spoke to their audience through formulas. Religious houses structured and phrased charters to a primary audience of secular and monastic elites—their donors, peers, and rivals. Messages of ecclesiastical authority framed the sections of charters that conveyed details about places, rights, and privileges. Next, I investigate how the secondary ecclesiastical audience of charters relates to prevailing concepts of authenticity. Charter scholarship typically privileges texts that most closely reflect a historical event at the purported date of a charter, but charters continued to speak to their cathedral community long after the original terms of a grant were executed as part of cartularies that assert ecclesiastical authority. Anglo-Saxon diplomatic, the evaluation of charters for authenticity, has helped organize and clarify surviving charters and reconstruct lost texts, but it can also hinder the study of the functional life of charter copies. In the third part, I discuss how charters directed daily life. Lower status individuals in
supporting roles to an ecclesiastical community experienced charters indirectly but the terms of these documents nevertheless governed processes like farming and trade. The fourth part of this chapter looks to recent work in archaeology for productive shared perspectives that challenge dominant approaches to history in pursuit of local conditions evident in charters.

**Charter Formulas and the Maintenance of Spiritual Authority**

Charters that record land-based relationships used standardized formulas to frame ecclesiastical interests and communicate their message to secular and ecclesiastical elites. The relentlessly formulaic conventions of charters include the invocation, proem, superscription (stylized reference to the authority of a king or bishop), dispositive section (the terms, conditions, and immunities conveyed in the charter), blessing, curse, boundary clause (a topographical description of the estate), dating clause, and witness-list. The dispositive section is the core of a charter that defines the terms of a land grant or privileges, such as ecclesiastical exemptions from taxation. This formula is the most flexible section of the charter and its presentation of details reflects political circumstances and the prerogatives of the kings and bishops who issued it. Boundary clauses are likewise unique to each grant and provide geographic notations to define the borders of an estate. The boundary clause appears at the end of the charter and is commonly written in Old

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4 For a comparison of these features across a range of charters see the ASChart database, hosted by King’s College London. Janet Nelson, the director of the project, describes the site: “Charters dating to before 900 have been ‘marked up’ using the electronic tagging system known as XML. This permits certain types of information to be identified, recognized, and compared between charters.”
English rather than Latin. Both the dispositive section and boundary clause spoke directly to elite status individuals by settling the practical matters of the grant.

More universal features of charters frame economic interests within the spiritual mission of the Church. The invocation could be pictorial, textual, or both. It is typically a small cross that, in conjunction with the textual invocation, conveyed to all named parties that they were entering into a sacred agreement. Invocations emphasize that the agreement that followed was undertaken “In the name of the Supreme God,” “In the name of the Redeemer of the world,” or some variation. Even royal diplomas (i.e., those issued by the king) included these features, indicating the control that the church exerted over charters as a medium. The superscription reminded the audience of the spiritual authority of the king or bishop who issued the grant. Dating clauses framed the charter within the larger context of a bishop’s administration and in reference to Christ’s birth. Simon Keynes acknowledges these ecclesiastical associations of royal diplomas but argues these qualities should not obscure that “the documents had a precise role to play in the secular context of Anglo-Saxon land tenure and law” (Diplomas 31). However, these operations, while legal, were not necessarily secular. All of the Church’s activities, including its acquisition and defense of economic interests, grew out of its religious vocation.

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6 The superscription is typically represented in printed editions with a cross pattée or maltese cross. See Whitelock, English Historical Documents 500-1042.

7 E.g. “Oswald, archbishop by the grace of God” (S 1374).

8 “This was done in the year 966 after the birth of our Lord in the seventh year after Bishop Oswald succeeded in office” (Robertson XLII; “The Electronic Sawyer” S 1374).
(Tinti *Sustaining Belief* 3). The diocese viewed their landed wealth as part of their spiritual mission, not as a secular asset.

Proems displayed a range of openings to charters but several examples assert the power of writing to enforce the terms of the charter. For example, S 1280 is a lease agreement drawn up in 904 between Bishop Wærferth and his community at Worcester and Æthelred, ealdorman of Mercia and his wife Æthelflæd that argues why writing must replace oral arrangements:

> It is known and manifest to all the wise that the words and deeds of men frequently slip from the memory, through manifold agitations caused by wicked deeds, and as the result of wandering thoughts, unless they are preserved and recalled to mind in the form of words and by the precaution of entrusting them to writing. (Robertson 35-6)

The proem of S 1280 is markedly skeptical of speech and memory. Wisdom in the proem entails understanding the power of writing to resist sinful deception and neglect. The proem also implies document use—charters both *reseruetur* “preserved” and *reuocentur* “recalled.” Charters preserved by codifying the terms of an agreement in an enduring medium and recall through their availability to the custodian of the document, the Worcester diocese, if rightful possessions were ever in need of defense.

Charters from other archives indicate that reflections on writing and memory are a common feature of proems. S 88 is a grant by King Æthelbald (d. 757) in 733 that exempted the church of Rochester in Kent from ship-tolls in the port of London that includes long proem that asserts the need for charters:
If those things which each bestows and grants to men by his word in order to receive a reward from God, could remain constantly stable, it would seem unnecessary that they should be recounted and strengthened in writing; but in truth nothing would seem stronger to prove donations and to refute the man wishing to infringe donations than charters of donation strengthened by the hands of donors and witnesses. (A. Campbell)\(^9\)

Sarah Foot uses this charter to illustrate the power of writing to establish the official story of an estate by drowning out competing narratives and memories. The charter, she writes, functions “not as an adjunct to recollection but its replacement” (41). As a replacement for memory, the charter thus insulated the benefactor from legal challenge, but it made a deeper claim about elite relationships. Oaths were no longer trustworthy and did not remain “constantly stable” despite the incentive of heavenly reward. The charter was structured to fulfill and protect God’s will regarding the transaction.

Charters also included formulas that reference God and remind the audience of the spiritual responsibilities and implications. Blessings and curses invoke God to assure that the terms of the charter are carried out and maintained. These “statements of pious consideration,” according to Foot, spoke to elites who might interfere with or bring suit against an ecclesiastical claim to an estate (41). S 1309 puts forward a clear spiritual message: “May St. Mary and St. Michael, with Peter and all the saints of God be merciful towards those who observe this. If anyone,

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\(^9\) Patrick Wormald judges S 88 to be “broadly trustworthy” despite some ninth century features (Bede and the Conversion of England 25). Dorothy Whitelock argues the charter is authentic and was copied to confirm the Worcester diocese’s rights to ship-tolls in 844 (English Historical Documents 491).
without due cause, attempts to break it, may God turn him to due amendment.” In this case, the curse combines spiritual correction with implied economic punishments. Charters close with lists of witnesses to the proceedings that codified the grant, and church officials dominated the lists on both royal diplomas and memoranda issued by the diocese. Their ecclesiastical identity is usually marked by references to their office along with a pictographic cross. Thus, when paired with the pictorial invocation, these elements bookend the charter with a display of sanctity visible to anyone who handled the document.

**Cartularies and the Problem of Authenticity**

Much of the work on charters over the past fifty years has employed diplomatic tests for authenticity that identify forgeries and strip away anachronistic features of charter copies, usually written in the 11th century, in pursuit of the historical context of much older lost original documents. This approach reconstructs the grant as it existed for the primary audience of Anglo-Saxon charters—the ecclesiastical and secular elites referenced by name and bound by the terms of the document. But charters also spoke to a secondary audience of high status individuals when recast by bishops who commissioned copies bound into volumes called cartularies. Scholarship that works through copies to reconstruct

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10 S 1309 is a lease from 966 issued by Bishop Oswald of Worcester of three hides at Hindlip, Worcestershire, with reversion to the bishopric. For a translation and commentary on the charter, see A.J. Robertson (86-7; 334-5).

11 A review of the Electronic Sawyer shows that much of the scholarly commentary for a given charter centers on its authenticity. For example, of the six citations for S 1251, a statement by bishop Ecgwine in 714 regarding the foundation of the minster at Evesham, only one addresses geography. All other comments address the authenticity of the charter. See, for example, David Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (41-2) who argues the charter is an inflated version of S 1250.
lost charters yields deep insights into Anglo-Saxon history, but discounts the relationship of charter copies to their historical moment both as individual documents and within a cartulary. To illuminate that context, I analyze how cartulary copies proclaimed and enforced ecclesiastical status.

A desire to reconstruct authentic documents is based on a hierarchical model that privileges authentic, original documents and presents later copies, fragments and forgeries as useful insofar as they clarify the terms of a lost original. Scribes who copied single-sheet charters into cartularies introduced a variety of errors, updates, or, as was often the case, forged elements or entire spurious documents. Pierre Chaplais established terms for addressing a charter’s relationship to authenticity: forgery, original, copy, and apparent original.¹² Originals include charters written in a contemporary hand with no suspicious features and copies that have no suspicious features but are not in a contemporary script. Apparent originals lack sufficient paleographical or diplomatic evidence to be firmly categorized. Forgeries include any charter with suspicious features that indicate deception. As applied in scholarship, this framework typically privileges original single-sheet charters, while copies stand in place of lost original versions. However, we should remember that Chaplais pursued work predicated on studying the earliest available originals to

¹² See Chaplais, “The Origin and Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diploma” and “The Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diplomas of Exeter.” See also “Some Early Anglo-Saxon Diplomas on Single Sheets: Originals or Copies?” Brooks argues that Chaplais’ categories help to discourage scholars from using spurious parts of charters to fit their interpretations on the grounds that anachronisms are “later interpolations,” a practice Brooks calls “the besetting sin of Anglo-Saxon historians” (“Anglo-Saxon Charters” 186).
argue when charters were first introduced in England. He developed his categories to organize an unruly corpus, not necessarily to project a universal hierarchy onto all scholarship.

Access to a surviving single sheet charter or an approximation of a lost original should not be viewed as a prerequisite for work on charters. The pursuit of authentic conditions and skepticism towards copies in charter scholarship is so pervasive that one entering the field is likely to take it for granted. Nicholas Brooks argues “authoritative work on Anglo-Saxon diplomatic has to be built, wherever possible, upon an understanding of those charters that survive as ‘apparent originals’ on single sheets of parchment” ("Anglo-Saxon Charters" 206). Brooks’ assessment is accurate for projects that center on the primary audience of a charter at the purported date of the document. This context demands original conditions. However, there are two types of authority at work in a charter copy. First, the copy represented the authority of the original document by reasserting its terms. Second, the copy as an object within its cartulary exerted authority as a component of the ritual life of the institution.

My term for addressing the ways in which a copy of a charter records a past event while simultaneously communicating with its historical moment is multi-vocality. In my view, multi-vocality or a comparable concept is necessary if we are to explore how charter copies, authentic or not, functioned at the time of their

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13 Chaplais argues from circumstantial evidence that Augustine of Canterbury (d.604) adapted charters from Roman models for use in England. See “Origin and Authenticity” (49-52).
production. When applied to Anglo-Saxon cartularies, a multi-vocal view transforms our perspective on charters from a model of preservation to a model of use. Each charter copy communicated a message. For example, a charter copy that modernized place names departs from its original to reduce confusion. This activity reveals flexible thinking about how past deeds were preserved, reshaped, and used (Foot 44). Updates to charters were essential to preserve their viability, and this process was repeated several times in some instances. Individual charters within the cartulary of the abbey of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk were copied and recopied through the 14th century and served as proofs in court of the abbey’s holdings and privileges (Lobel 128-33).

More comprehensive revisions of archives were also undertaken in many religious houses in the late Anglo-Saxon period in response to unprecedented challenges to monastic assets. For example, Bishop Wulfstan II (1062-95) initiated the program that directed Hemming and his contemporaries to take better care of their archives at Worcester (Hearne 282-6).14 Hemming and his monks made copies of early charters that collectively asserted monastic rights in response to intrusions from external power, both secular and ecclesiastical (Keynes "Hemming" 231).15 Indeed, the general decline of monastic life from the 9th century onwards necessitated a reassessment of the role of an archive to protect an ecclesiastical

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14 For an account of Wulfstan II’s episcopate, see Tinti, Sustaining Belief (58-67). Tinti views Wulfstan II’s episcopate as an extension of many of the programs started by Oswald in the tenth century to manage estates, monastic life, and the Worcester archive.

15 This cartulary is referenced as Wulfstan’s Cartulary or the Nero-Middleton Cartulary (BL Cotton Nero E. i, pt ii, fols. 181-4 + BL Add. 46204, fols. 1 and 2)
community’s landed wealth. Pre-Alfredian title deeds achieved new currency in a cartulary with a tightly controlled message organized across a careful arrangement of charters that spoke louder than a single loose text.

Alterations to original charters or the fabrication of new ones for inclusion in cartularies does not obscure how charters were used. Charters were altered to update their message and respond to legal challenges. Bishops enhanced the power of the archive by reorganizing their documents into single volumes. The motives of a religious house to update or forge documents are clear. As an archival practice, updates and forgeries filled in gaps in the documentary record, granted privileges, or were produced specifically for use in litigation against an opposing party. Individual charters were used by later generations to address practical concerns through updates and forgeries that clarified matters or claimed new assets.\(^\text{16}\) As a body of texts, a cartulary also made statements about the authority of the religious house. As an object, the volume displayed power through its presence in ritualized displays.

Cartularies were ritual objects with material features that conveyed messages of ecclesiastical power. Scholars have long assessed the function of single-sheet original charters in ceremonies that sanctified grants.\(^\text{17}\) To place a charter and a sod of earth on an altar or gospel-book during an estate transfer incorporated the

\(^{16}\) For an account of contexts of forgeries of Worcester charters, see Tinti, “The Reuse of Charters at Worcester Between the Eighth and the Eleventh Century: A Case-Study” (127-41).

text into a highly visible ritual (Kelly "Anglo-Saxon Lay Society" 29). Cartularies also had ritual significance most clearly visible when they were incorporated into the bible of a religious house. As part of Bishop Wulfstan's instructions for the cartulary mentioned above, Hemming was directed to incorporate the charters into Worcester's Bible. Although the cartulary as it survives today is not bound in a bible manuscript, paleographic evidence and mentions of a gift from King Offa (757-796) of a "magnificent Bible" (S 118) give credence to the story (Turner and Wilson xli-xlii).¹⁸ The pairing of a religious house's cartulary with a ceremonial bible reinforces messages about spiritual authority and economic power evident in the formulae of individual charters. From their earliest use, religious houses in Anglo-Saxon England exercised tight control over the form and content of their charters, infusing even royal diplomas with clear markers of ecclesiastical identity. Late stage archives dramatically advanced that theme by bringing charters out from dark corners of the library into full view of the community of monks, priests, and laymen.

**Charters and Local Flows of Power**

In addition to their function as symbolic displays of spiritual authority, charters impacted the daily lives of lower status individuals. Royal families and members of the secular and clerical elite founded churches and monasteries through charters.¹⁹ These institutions, and the bishops they answered to,

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¹⁸ S 118 has some forged elements, particularly its account of the estate at Hampton. See Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature* (163 n.94).

¹⁹ Many minster churches seem to have had administrative functions. See John Blair, "Minster Churches and the Landscape" (35-58). See also Richard Hodges, *Dark Edge Economics* (177).
engineered regional land use. Peasants comprised a largely invisible labor force within charter evidence and charters do not address those who work the land in the same way as those who control land. However, the daily rhythm of the lives of low status individuals lies beneath the surface in most charters. Charters directed the lives of peasants and their supervisors through formulas that reference land use. Bishops imposed market and field systems upon peasants through charters. For peasants, charters are not read or possessed, but experienced. Through boundary clauses and the dispositive conditions of charters, we catch glimpses of daily jobs and concerns like moving stock to pasture or delivering foodstuffs within a local market economy. This gritty reality lies beneath the literary proems, invocations to God, and lists of important people that feature most prominently in charters, but the revenue that laborers generated as a consequence of the document illustrate the practical purpose of charters. In this section, I present the potential and pitfalls of exploring daily life in charters to illustrate that for a more complete view, an interdisciplinary method is often necessary to augment a reading of documentary evidence.

20 Day-to-day operations on estates were likely managed by reeves (gerefa in Old English). They supervised workers, carried money and messages, and represented landlords in court disputes. See Rosamond Faith, “Estate Management” (175-6).

21 For example, after the fortification of Worcester in the 880s, Bishop Wærferth instituted a system of tolls on goods coming into the city through charter S 223. See Baker and Holt, Urban Growth and the Medieval Church (133-4).

22 Dyer discusses the detailed rent obligations in a number of charters that enumerate precise annual renders for ale, corn, meat, cheese, and other items (Lords and Peasants 28-9). See also Allen J. Frantzen for commentary on transfer, storage, and preparation of foodstuffs in reference to food rents (Food, Eating and Identity 46). For charters that list food rents, see S 1195 and S 1278.
Named parties in charters negotiated lease terms that mediated land use at these places, while daily activities were more or less carried out by the nameless cottagers who cultivated around thirty acres of arable land.\textsuperscript{23} The estate is the most common place addressed in charters, and it intersects with every level of Anglo-Saxon society. Boundary clauses, attached to many charters, defined land use in addition to defining boundaries.\textsuperscript{24} Boundary clauses are valuable to the study of places because they offer specific descriptions of estates within the context of the surrounding landscape, but they are of limited use in what they can tell us about daily life. Boundary clauses indicate where an estate was located and its dimensions by referencing prominent landscape features in line of sight notations.

A typical boundary clause starts in the southeast corner of an estate and enumerates features along the edge until ending where it began (Jenkyns 97). The names of these features can imply land use at a site, especially when read in concert with other kinds of evidence. However, boundary clauses only trace the perimeter of an estate, and the activities of daily life, such as moving animals to pasture or cutting timber that fuels salt furnaces, occurred within or across these boundaries. For example, in areas where material evidence confirms extensive tracts of arable land, boundary clauses may only reference streams, dykes, or other geographic features (Hooke "Charters and the Landscape" 79). Bounds tend to use terms for land use

\textsuperscript{23} See Dyer, Lords and Peasants for estimates on acreage worked by peasant communities (176).

\textsuperscript{24} Hooke's Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds organizes charters from the Worcester archive by century and by whether they include bounds. Approximately sixty percent of Worcester archive charters include bounds (8-15).
when the boundary cuts across extensive areas of arable land absent of more prominent geographic features along the perimeter of the estate.

Although close analysis of vocabulary can overcome some limitations of boundary clauses as evidence for daily life, words for land use are often ambiguous when understood in isolation. Della Hooke investigates a clause that includes the following boundaries: hopwudes wica ("Hopwood’s farm") and eamban erne ("Eamba’s building"). Hooke identifies wica as a genitive plural form of wic (dairy-farm) (Worcestershire 138). Erne, or more commonly ærn, is a word for house or building. A review of the DOE shows that in laws and charters ærn can denote a workshop or storehouse. However, there is some debate on the translation of these terms. Allen Mawer and Frank Stenton interpret hopwudes as the elements hop and wudu ("wood in the valley") (333). Margaret Gelling contends that hop in this instance actually means “enclosure” (Place-Names in the Landscape 116). The ambiguity here highlights one of the difficulties of working with boundary clauses in isolation. Boundary clause evidence fosters scholarship for the historical study of places and geography, but for activity on the ground the evidence is often incidental and unclear. Nicholas Brooks warns against stripping boundary clauses from the diplomatic, paleography and language of the charter ("Anglo-Saxon Charters" 223). Coordinating boundary clause evidence with other charter formulae and material evidence can clarify ambiguities in some instances.

25 The charter, S 1272, is an grant at Cofton Hacket, Rednal, Wast Hills, and Hopwood by Bishop Ealhun to King Berhtwulf in 849.
Dispositive clauses often have more to say about the fluidity of land use than static descriptions of boundaries because they give imperatives for what land is to be used for and even sometimes mention laymen by name who carried out these directives. The dispositive clause is where the charter speaks most directly to local activity. Through this formula, a religious house managed its assets. Charters did much more than claim ownership over land; they defined its use. Woodlands are a prominent example of a tightly managed resource because of the number of competing labor interests such as pasturing, fuel, and construction. For example, the Worcester diocese used charters to regulate timber exploitation to manage increasing demands on woodland resources. An 866 grant of Seckley in Wolverley from King Burgred to a layman, Wulfred, outlined provisions for timber. Wulfred had rights to “five wagon loads/wainloads of good rods, and every year one oak tree for building” (S 212). As a named figure in a charter, Wulfred is likely a high status laymen, but charters also trace the deterioration of peasant rights to common woods. Bishops claimed rights in areas previously under common ownership. A tenth century lease of Thorne in the Inkberrow parish refers to the right to cut wood in the gemaenan grafe (“common copse”) (S 1305). Although peasants would likely have continued to pasture stock and take lesser timbers from woods in some areas, individuals or the church claimed most regional leah (woodland) zones by charter (Hooke "Woodland Landscape" 157). Assessment of a range of charters covering the same area reveals these patterns of land use that overtook previous arrangements and shifted peasant activity.
In the contexts we have examined thus far, peasants are anonymous workers whose lives are implied in charters. There are instances where charters address peasants by name, and these moments, though uncommon, reveal details about rank and responsibilities. In an 896 agreement between Wærferth, bishop of Worcester and a layman Æthelwald, we see Æthelwald’s *geneat* actively participate in a land transaction:

And he ordered his geneat, whose name was Ecglaf, to ride with a priest from Worcester, Wulfhun by name; and Ecglaf led Wulfhun along all the boundaries, as Wulfhun read out from the old books, how they had been determined of old by the grant of King Aethelbald. (S 1441)

The perambulation described in S 1441 was a method used to verify boundaries in a land dispute, and the mention of a *geneat* in the charter enumerates aspects of his role not addressed in other types of sources. The *geneat* (“follower” or “dependent”) occupied the highest peasant position on an estate. *Geneats* owed light service that mostly involved riding and carrying messages. According to David Douglas they appear as “primarily a riding servant, acting perhaps as a bailiff on a large estate. He was a man of some standing” (875 n.3).  

This elevated role is reflected in the charter as Wulfhun is referenced by name. Wulfhun codified the terms of the grant and established its veracity in conjunction with a set of bounds from the “old books," in this case an authentic charter with spurious bounds likely fabricated for this

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26 The duties of the *geneat* are most fully articulated in *Rectitudines Singularum Personarum*, an 11th century treatise that outlines seigniorial relationships (Douglas). See also Dyer, “10,000 West Midland Peasants.”
occasion (Hooke *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 52).27 The charter’s reference to a *geneat* builds on what we know about this class of peasant from other sources.28 Charters provide a representation of peasant activity in a local context rather than through generalized lists of duties.

Charters where laymen are benefactors further connect us to life on the ground. For example, S 1281 records a grant by Bishop Wærferth of Worcester in 904 to his reeve Wulfsige of one hide at Aston Magna.29 Wulfsige received the estate for three lives with reversion to Worcester, a common practice intended to keep estates from falling out of permanent control of the diocese through inheritance. The charter includes no boundary clause but includes a description: *ðæt Innlond beligeð an dic utane* (“all the demesne land is surrounded by a dyke outside”) (Robertson 34-5). Innlond is translated demesne and refers to the land attached to a manor, and the reference to a dyke indicates natural or manmade regulation of water levels at the site. This charter does not include a boundary clause that would have provided more information about land use but comparison to other charters that feature dykes and evidence from the fields of geography and archaeology can enhance our perspective on Aston Magna’s location and use.30

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27 S 103. A 716 grant by Æthelbald (d. 757) to the church of St Peter, Worcester of three of woodland at Woodchester.

28 See Dyer, “St Oswald and 10,000 West Midland Peasants”

29 A *hide* (*hid*) is a former measure of land in England of between 60 and 120 acres. Hides are also referenced as *manetes* or *cassati* in charters. See Martin J. Ryan, “That ‘Dreary Old Question’: the Hide in Early Anglo-Saxon England” (207-210).

30 For a map of the estate, see Rosamond Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (171).
S 1281 has a number of administrative implications. Many charters have direct financial benefits for the diocese. A small grant such as this is negligible from that perspective, which might explain why it was never copied into a cartulary, but evidence from other charters indicates administrative mechanisms at work here. The three-life provision directed that “the estate shall be given back without any controversy to Worcester.” Aston Magna has since been identified with the site White Ladies Aston and appears again in S 1333, a 977, a grant by Bishop Oswald of Worcester to a layman Cynulf (Robertson 294). The appearance of the charter in a grant 74 years after S 1281 demonstrates that the three-life provision was a successful administrative policy to recover leased estates. On the textual level, this charter is one of the earliest surviving chirographs (Finberg West Midlands no. 90). A chirograph is a type of single-sheet charter written in duplicate and cut across the word *chirographum* (equivalent). Both halves of the charter could be placed together to confirm that the document is authentic. The surviving half is from the Worcester archive, but Wulfsige would have possessed the other copy to confirm his rights to the estate. A charter in the hands of a reeve links a text that accounts for land to an officer with local responsibilities. The most discussed charters in scholarship address Anglo-Saxon life on a large political scale and record the transfer or massive estates of 100 hides or more. Those charters have implications that filter down into the lives of Anglo-Saxon men and women; however, as we would expect, large-scale charters often only preserve faint echoes of peasant life. S 1281 exemplifies a small charter with significant local contexts that typically
appears in the footnotes of scholarship on elite politics but can be brought into the conversation in a study focused on local flows of power.

**Moving Towards Local Narratives Through Charters and Archaeology**

Charters provide a local context for archaeological evidence. Both charters and material evidence are immersed in local events and can pursue questions on how sites were organized and functioned within their community. The relationship between charters and daily experience remains an understudied context in charter studies and archaeology, disciplines with a prevailing focus on elite culture, but there are signs this is changing (Frantzen *Food, Eating and Identity* 4). Two recent companion volumes of conference proceedings illustrate a trajectory in scholarship away from general and national explanations towards specific and local analysis.31 Nicholas J. Higham and Martin J. Ryan edited both volumes, and they feature articles on archaeological evidence for activities such as coppicing, plowing, and cereal production.32 Articles on place names examine topics such as names for woodlands and traveler’s landmarks.33 Much of the textual evidence in these studies comes from charters. As we have seen, charters impact life on the ground for low status individuals. My approach to charters based on local flows of power addresses how

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31 See Landscape Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England and Place-Names Language and the Anglo-Saxon Landscape.

32 See Christopher Grocock, "Barriers to Knowledge: Coppicing and Landscape Usage in the Anglo-Saxon Economy"; David Hill, "The Anglo-Saxon Plough: A Detail of the Wheels"; and Debby Banham, “‘In the Sweat of thy Brow Shalt thou eat Bread’: Cereals and Cereal Production in the Anglo-Saxon Landscape.”

33 See Della Hooke, “The Woodland Landscape of Early Medieval England” and Ann Cole, “Place Names and Traveller’s Landmarks.”
the elite relationships and negotiations to acquire and manage estates had outcomes that filtered down into the lives of those who lived and worked on the church’s estates.

By focusing on the charters of the Worcester diocese, I am studying the local implications of a limited number of texts. These charters were drafted and possessed by a succession of kings and bishops and addressed land use on estates that often appear in several charters. My local focus avoids what Christopher Loveluck calls “grand narratives” and “synthetic interpretations” that gloss over regional and local complexities (19-20). In archaeology, this national perspective finds expression in work that assesses Anglo-Saxon England in broad periods on a national scale. Consequently, local deviations confirm rather than undercut broad periodization because they are viewed as “exceptions” (19). Allen J. Frantzen points out that research based on texts commonly takes a similar approach. Historians and literary scholars commonly assess Anglo-Saxon events using “broad divisions among Bede (d. 735), Alfred (d. 899), and Ælfric (d. 1010)” (Food, Eating and Identity 20). As a result, many deep and nuanced studies of texts, particularly literary ones, operate on flat historical perspectives that cannot address regional contexts.

In charter studies the dominant grand narratives divide the Anglo-Saxon period into two broad eras: trading towns from the seventh to the ninth centuries during urban foundation and the growth of urban centers and trade networks from
the 880s to the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. From wide angles, this interpretation conforms to charter evidence as late Anglo-Saxon grants do address new trade relationships within fortified markets called *burhs*. However, the before and after model centered on the emergence of urban settlements obscures and ignores local developments in rural zones that expanded and contracted irregularly in response to political conditions and the initiatives of individual bishops. A diocese could see drastic changes in lease patterns and taxation on time scales of years and decades rather than centuries and on geographic scales of estates and parishes rather than kingdoms. Broad models of history are not useful when assessing these discreet local conditions. For example, King Offa’s (757-96) charters are commonly studied in relation to his military campaigns or regnal style (Stenton "The Supremency of the Mercian Kings" 444). From that perspective, Offa tends to become his own national era, as forty-five of his charters are extant throughout a number of major and minor charter archives. However, the impact of Offa’s

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34 For periodization along these lines, see Martin Biddle, “The Development of the Anglo-Saxon Town” (204).

35 See for example, Hooke’s work on Droitwich. High demand for salt led to the development of a sophisticated trade network managed from Worcester well before the emergence of the city as a “trading town” in the 880s. See Hooke, “The Droitwich Salt Industry: an Examination of the West Midland Charter Evidence” (123-69). See S 102, a charter dated to 716 for charter evidence of early ecclesiastical salt rights and trade networks.

36 Regnal style refers to the stylized name that introduces a king in a charter. For example, in S 116 Offa is called *rex Mercensium simulque in circuitu nationum*, a style Stenton identifies Æthelbald (716-757) and variations of which appear in a number of Kentish and South Saxon Charters. See also, Ian Walker, *Mercia and the Making of England* and Barbara Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms in Early Anglo-Saxon England*.

37 Offa’s charters appear in Canterbury, Kent, Worcester, Rochester, St. Albans, and more. See *The Electronic Sawyer*. 
charters on local conditions has been obscured in broad discussions of national
events. King Offa instituted a policy to eliminate the practice of permanent
alienation of ecclesiastical estates, thereby exposing Worcester’s estates to potential
secular control and taxation. Worcester was forced to surrender several large
estates under the policy, and later kings such at Beorhtwulf of Mercia (839-52)
referenced these charters in an attempt to force similar concessions from the
diocese.

Archaeological work aimed towards local conditions of production connects
with charters that provide a context for objects and activities revealed by
excavations. Archaeological evidence resonates well with a local approach to
charters because both pursue the conditions of life on the ground and the
archaeology can help overcome the limits of textual evidence. For example, S 52,
which is a land grant to the Ripple monastery in the West Midlands from the last
half of the seventh century, demonstrates a convergence of textual and
archaeological evidence. The monastery occupied thirty hides and includes a
number of assets described in the charter as omnibus utilitatibus ("all useful
things"): woodland, pastures, fields, meadows, and riverine fisheries. Ripple was a
wealthy independent monastery that shows up in a number of disputes where

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38 See, for example, Ian Walker, *Mercia and the Making of England.*
39 See S 1257. In 781, Hathored, bishop of the Hwicce (Worcester) surrendered a total of 120 hides to Offa.
40 For commentary on the topography of the estate at Ripple, see Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature* (104-5; 375) and Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter-Bounds* (20).
bishops and abbots vied for control (Sims-Williams "St. Wilfrid" 174-5). The charters relating to Ripple reveal the political life of the site. For example, we can infer a large labor force from the agriculture, pasturing, fishing, and woodland exploitation from the list of assets in S 52. In order to see how these resources were used, we must go beyond texts to material evidence of structures, animal husbandry, and industry.

Excavations at Ripple reveal an Anglo-Saxon settlement with evidence for site activity that corresponds with charter evidence.\textsuperscript{41} The presence of meadowland, an abundance of hay, and the predominance of remains of larger boned animals reflect the exploitation of adjacent river meadows for grazing (Watt 161). The damp conditions at Ripple were also ideal for dairy storage (Barber, Watts and Alexander 81). Among other activities at Ripple, there is evidence of small-scale smithing consistent with maintenance of farm implements (Barber, Watts and Alexander 81). The dominant economic evidence outside of farming is the weaving of wool, flax, and hemp. Loomweight fragments appear in most backfill deposits, and the damp environment was necessary for loom working (82). According to Barber, Watt’s and Alexander, although clearly Anglo-Saxon in fabric and form, the surviving pottery and loomweights can only be dated to within a broad range of 450-850 (82). Documentary evidence in S 52 can be used to refine that date. S 52 records a grant in 680 by King Oshere (680-693) to Frithuwald, a Worcester monk of Bishop Winfrid (likely Wilfrid) of 30 hides at Ripple.\textsuperscript{42} The land grant to the Ripple

\textsuperscript{41} For a site report, see Barber et al., Excavations at Saxon’s Lode Farm, Ryall Quarry, Ripple 2001-2.
monastery in the last half of the seventh century coincides with the occupation window of the material evidence, and surviving Roman road system connected the site with emerging markets controlled by the Worcester diocese.

Archaeological evidence speaks of activities at a site with depth not found in purely historical studies of charters, and it is easy for the textual scholar to get lost in a sea of loom weights and sheep bones. However, archaeological approaches to evidence provide theoretical models to explore how everyday people lived their everyday lives. In that respect, my work on charters, in chapter 5, attempts to end up where archaeology begins, with traces of daily life on the ground. Material and textual evidence exist in what Frantzen calls “a steady friction” (Food, Eating and Identity 4) and in the chapters that follow I explore how approaches that accounts for local experience can confront charter evidence and a body of scholarship dominated by big questions charters about political and spiritual life.

**Locating Worcester and its Archive**

This chapter has taken a broad view of charters by exploring how these documents reached their audience. The broadly defined role of charters in a diocese was to act as an enduring representation of ecclesiastical and economic authority. This message was communicated differently to secular and ecclesiastical elites than it was to people of lower status. The implicit goal of charters was almost always to grow and protect the Church’s assets. Charters pursued that goal through formulas that emphasize economic and spiritual power. Those messages were recast when

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42 For more on Wilfrid’s likely connection to S 52, see Sims-Williams, “St Wilfrid and two charters dated AD 676 and 680” (163-183).
charters were copied into cartularies to speak to new generations of benefactors and rivals, and the high stakes dealings charters record often obscure the ways charters directed daily life. A detailed exploration of these contexts requires a disciplined regional focus. The next chapter analyzes this material from the foundation of the Worcester diocese in 680 through the reign of King Offa of Mercia (757-96). The Worcester diocese was founded with the goal of creating a powerful institution to oversee the spiritual life of the West Midlands while acquiring and safeguarding an endowment capable of sustaining that mission. The royal diplomas of this period became a battleground for the diocese in negotiations with kings and independent monasteries not always sympathetic to Worcester’s interests, and these events and policies had discernable consequences for the lives of elite status clerics and laymen as well as lower status skilled and unskilled laborers throughout the diocese.
CHAPTER 2

FIELDS AND CHARTERS: INSULATING THE WORCESTER DIOCESE FROM SECULAR AUTHORITY

From its foundation in 680, the Worcester diocese was equipped with resources to dominate spiritual and economic life in the West Midlands. The diocese was founded to serve the kingdom of the Hwicce, a client kingdom of Mercia that contributed to the initial endowment of the see. From the cathedral, the bishop of Worcester ruled as the lord of the city, and most commercial activity, landed wealth, and defense around Worcester was under his direct control. When Mercia assimilated the Hwiccian kingdom in the 780s, the land and privileges that Worcester’s bishops had accumulated through charters came under pressure from kings less sympathetic to their interests than the Hwicce had been. King Offa (757-96) chipped away at land and immunities within Worcester’s tightly controlled local network. To contend with these pressures, Worcester shifted from a model of complete control over a small territory around Worcester to a more dispersed model of power that reached into other trading centers and across the rural hinterland.

This chapter assesses the ways in which Worcester used charters to preserve and expand wealth and power from their foundation through the height of the Mercian dynasty in the mid-ninth century. Most scholarship on politics and the
landscape that addresses Worcester's early history (the seventh to the ninth century) treats charters as passive records of single events. The systematic use of charters is ascribed to later periods. For example, Christopher Dyer identified Bishop Oswald's (961-92) charters as “the first systematic use of writing to record tenancies” ("St Oswald" 175). This argument asserts an evolutionary model for charters from isolated and simple to systematic and complex and has a long history in charter scholarship. According to Frank Stenton, “The earliest English charters show in their draftsmanship that they are the work of men handling an unfamiliar legal instrument with caution” (Latin Charters 33). Stenton described early charters as straightforward and factual, lacking the sophisticated literary proems and curses of later diplomas. It is true that those features did evolve over time, as Stenton said. However, the absence of literary features in early charters that were simple in form should not be understood to mean that they were simplistic in their deployment or in their results. A charter is a title deed to a piece of land, but it is not only that. Bishops in Worcester used charters to restructure land use on a large scale and in a systematic way. I argue bishops of the Worcester diocese in the eighth and early ninth centuries expanded their wealth and deflected encroaching Mercian secular authority through charters that assimilated independent monasteries and managed land use and commodities like timber and salt across a growing network of estates.

To study the planned matrix for land use and estate development behind Worcester’s charters, I evaluate these documents as responses to political
conditions and as evidence for land use. I do so in three parts. The chapter begins
with analysis of the see during the Hwiccian period from its foundation through the
rule of its first eight bishops. During this time, most charters were donations by
Hwiccian and Mercian kings directly to the diocese or to surrounding monasteries in
Worcestershire and Warwickshire. When Mercia assimilated the Hwicce in the mid-
eighth century, Worcester’s estates came under pressure from kings who wanted to
curtail certain privileges and place estates in the hand of thegns or family members.
Despite these pressures, the bishops of Worcester used charters to expand their
wealth and influence. The second part of the argument examines efforts by
Worcester’s early bishops insulate the diocese from secular influence by taxing,
acquiring, and developing monasteries to broaden their power base. Then I examine
Worcester’s efforts to restructure land use by using monasteries as regional
administrative hubs to manage land use and industry in rural zones.

**Worcester’s Foundation and Hwiccian Legacy**

The Worcester diocese emerged from and responded to ecclesiastical and
secular politics from the time of its foundation in 680, and had pastoral
responsibilities over a large area that was supported initially by a modest
endowment. The territory of the Worcester diocese corresponded to the kingdom of
the Hwicce, a client kingdom of Mercia, and Hwiccian and Mercian kings supplied
the diocese with their initial estates. Although documentary evidence for the earliest
years of the diocese is incomplete, many of the estates from the initial grant can be
inferred from mentions in later charters.¹ There is also significant documentary and material evidence for Worcester cathedral, the bishop’s residence and administrative headquarters.² The see in its early years directed local ecclesiastical and economic activity with bishops appointed from outside of the region, and the Worcester diocese continued to identify itself as a Hwiccian rather than a Mercian institution long after Hwicce was assimilated into Mercia. The relationship between the Worcester diocese and Mercian kings was mixed throughout the Mercian dynasty punctuated by charters recording large donations to the see and unfavorable charters that seized church assets, founded royal monasteries, or curtailed rights and privileges.

The foundation of the Worcester diocese was part of a comprehensive restructuring of the Anglo-Saxon church. Since Theodore’s arrival in Britain in 668 the English church acknowledged a single archbishop, but the council of Hereford in 672 was the “first occasion on which that unity found practical expression” (Stenton Anglo-Saxon England 133).³ The most important act of the council was to empower the archbishop to form new dioceses. Theodore balanced his diocesan reforms against the political disunity. He divided the large existing see at East Anglia because

¹ See S 207. This charter issued in 855 is the first documentary reference to a minster at Blockley but the grant implies that the estate was founded decades earlier. For commentary on S 207, see Hooke, “Pre-Conquest Woodland” (125).


³ The English church operated under a single archbishop until the elevation of the see of York into an archbishopric in AD 735 (Hooke Anglo-Saxon Landscape 87;135).
it had become too unruly for its ailing bishop. Lindsey was part of the original diocese of Lichfield before Ecgfrith of Northumbria invaded the territory. This brought Lindsey under the authority of the bishop at York in 674. In 677, Theodore was able to separate Lindsey into an independent diocese (134). His actions in Mercia were more decisive. The Mercian diocese had grown too large for one bishop. When the Hwiccian prince Osric petitioned for a separate diocese for his territory, Theodore and King Æthelred I of Mercia (675-704) obliged. Theodore formed the diocese of Worcester in 680 to serve the kingdom of the Hwicce and designated Hereford as the diocese for the neighboring kingdom of the Magonsætan.

Contemporary political reality, administrative convenience, and ecclesiastical continuity drove Theodore’s decision to establish the seventh century cathedral at Worcester rather than at the more central location in the Hwiccian kingdom. According to James Tait, Anglo-Saxon kings typically used the most prominent former Roman settlements as regional capitals and some became bishop’s sees (6). Nigel Baker and Richard Holt identify Worcester as a semi-deserted Roman settlements promoted to a major ecclesiastical see (Urban Growth 127). There were seemingly more logical locations for the see. Worcester did have importance as an

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4 Theodore appointed two coadjutors who would become bishops of independent dioceses at Dunwich and North Elmham in Norfolk (Stenton Anglo-Saxon England 133).

5 He also carved small dioceses out of the Mercian kingdom at Sidnacester, Leicester, and Lichfield (Stenton Anglo-Saxon England 134).

6 For the Roman background of Worcester, see Martin Carver, “Introduction: An Archaeology for the City of Worcester” (1-11) and Graham Webster, “Prehistoric Settlement and Land Use in the West Midlands and the Impact of Rome (31-58).
industrial and minor administrative center, but other regional sites such as Gloucester were arguably more important. Indeed, other early sees were founded at imposing Roman palace sites at York, Winchester, and Leicester—all locations with more significant architecture and surviving infrastructure than Worcester (Hooke Anglo-Saxon Landscape 80). However, Worcester had its advantages. One was its small, ready-made defensive circuit. It was also major river crossing, and, as a location, had sufficient prestige (Biddle 212-14). Della Hooke also identifies an enduring Celtic identity in the Hwicce, which could explain the choice of Worcester in the extreme west of the kingdom where we find the highest density of Celtic place names and material evidence (Anglo-Saxon Landscape 80). Worcester’s Hwiccian roots ran deep and the early years of the see are best understood in the context of the emergence of the Hwicce and their relationship to Mercia.

In the seventh century, the kingdom of the Hwicce arose in the shadow of Mercian dominance to obtain recognition. As a client-kingdom to Mercia, the Hwicce controlled much of the territory within the later counties of Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, and Warwickshire. The Tribal Hidage assesses the Hwiccian kingdom at 7000 hides, a figure comparable to the kingdoms of Essex and Sussex. The document catalogs hidages for the seventh or eighth century, but survives in an eleventh century copy that has likely undergone significant corruption and alteration. One significant question about the value of the Tribal Hidage is whether

7 "Hwinca syfan þusend hyda" (Birch no. 297). The Tribal Hidage is presumably a Mercian memorandum. It is probable that the document is a Mercian “tribute list” recording internal subdivision of territories under Mercian control (Stenton Anglo-Saxon England 134).
its figures refer to tribes or administrative areas (J. Campbell *The Anglo-Saxons* 61).

Frank Stenton points out that the list puts names in the genitive plural, an indication that it refers to tribes or folks rather than districts (*Anglo-Saxon England* 295). While its round numbers imply a certain amount of exaggeration in hidage values, it nevertheless provides “primary evidence for the real character of the local divisions—the *regiones* or *provinciae*—mentioned incidentally by early historians” (297). I conclude that the *Tribal Hidage* likely demonstrates the administrative plan of the Mercian dynasty to maintain tribal boundaries for their subject provinces.

The Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia began taking control of smaller Anglo-Saxon and British groups early in the mid-seventh century. Local alliances of Anglo-Saxons and British inhabitants in the West Midlands seem to have welcomed the Mercians into their territory to assist in their fight against the West Saxons (Morris 230). Frank Stenton argues that Penda of Mercia (c. 622-55) created the kingdom of the Hwicce as part of his reorganization of the loosely constituted Angles and Saxons tribal groups of the lower Severn under a single lordship (Stenton *Anglo-Saxon England* 45). The *Chronicle* places Penda’s accession at 626 and recounts his defeat of Cynegils and Cwichelm at Cirencester in 628, a decisive battle that brought the Hwicccian territory under Mercian control. Despite what the *Chronicle* claims, Penda may not have been a powerful king at the time of the battle. Stenton places Penda’s accession at 632, and argues that at the time of his victory at Cirencester, Penda was “a landless noble of the Mercian royal house fighting for his own hand”
Penda’s gamble paid off and throughout his reign he expanded his influence well beyond his Mercian borders (J. Campbell *The Anglo-Saxons* 177).

Five generations of the Hwiccean dynasty can be traced through charters, but no regnal lists or genealogies are extant.\(^8\) Mercia retained control of the Hwicce for the measure of their dynasty and their overlordship is expressed in charters. Offa (757-96) referred to Ealdred, a Hwiccean ruler, as “my under-king, ealdorman, that is, of his own people of the Hwicce” (“The Electronic Sawyer” S 113; Yorke 263). However, this subservient status did not necessarily correspond to a loss of real power. Patrick Sims-Williams argues that Mercian overlordship likely helped Hwiccean rulers to exert control of minor tribes in the area, such as the *Pencersætan* in the north or the *Weogorena* in the west (*Religion and Literature* 32). Arthur Jones identifies forty distinct tribal units within the Hwiccean territory (44). None of these groups appear in the *Tribal Hidage*; they were insignificant from the perspective of a Mercian dynasty more interested in exacting tribute from larger client kingdoms. Thus it came about that the management of smaller groups was left to the Hwiccean administration and the Worcester diocese (A. Jones 49).

There was a close association with the Hwiccean kingdom and Worcester diocese, as we see in a charter dated to AD 718. S 1254 refers to Wilfrid as “bishop of the Hwicce” and the city of Worcester as *metropolim Huicciorum* (“metropolis of the Hwicce”). These references point to the town’s early status as a center of authority over a significant area (J. Campbell *Essays* 140). Members of the Hwiccean

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\(^8\) Charters issued by Hwiccean kings include S 53 and S 1177. See Jones, *Anglo-Saxon Worcester* (50).
dynasty ruled between 679 and 785 and were the principal benefactors of the Worcester diocese during the episcopates of Worcester’s first eight bishops: Bosel (679-92), Oftfor (692-93), Egwine (693-717), Wilfrid (717-743), Mildred (743-775), Weremund (775-777), Tilhere (777-781), and Heathored (781-98). Both the royal house of the Hwicce and the early bishops of Worcester came from outside the region. As mentioned above, the Hwiccian kingdom was a loose conglomeration of tribes organized under a single sub-king by Penda. No family within the province had inherited or claimed a right to rule. Hooke writes, “In spite of the presence of a population that may initially have been predominantly of British stock, most scholars have seen Anglo-Saxon lordship as the driving force in the formation and recognition of the kingdom” (Anglo-Saxon Landscape 12). The bishops were appointed from outside as well. The first three bishops of Worcester came from Whitby; thus, “as far as Anglo-Saxon Worcestershire was concerned it received Christianity from Northumbria and not from Canterbury” (A. Jones 49).

The practical implications of the northern influence on the church of Worcester is difficult to discern, but this Northumbrian legacy certainly made its way into the mythos of the local church. More generally, the decision to install an external ecclesiastical power base rather than elevating members of the local church illustrates that the Worcester diocese had its beginnings as an outside element rather than a reorganization of an existing religious community. In order for

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9 Bishop Lightfoot in 1892 stated, “Not Augustine, but Aidan, is the true Apostle of England. From Lindisfarne in the north-east to Lichfield and Worcester in the west, it was his teaching, his traditions, and his influence which prevailed” (Keynes "Penda" 361-2).
Worcester to grow quickly from modest beginnings to become the dominant economic power in the region within a few generations, the diocese required both a favorable initial endowment recorded in charters and a series of shrewd political maneuvers.

Early city planning after the see’s foundation transformed Worcester into a decidedly ecclesiastical place (Fleming 244). The small St. Peter’s Church in the city of Worcester was chosen as the Bishop’s residence and thus became a cathedral. St. Peter’s is frequently mentioned in Worcester’s early charters (S 77; S 103). The initial structure was likely small. Seaxwulf, the bishop of Lichfield, built and founded St. Peter’s Church shortly before the diocese was divided and the church would have been expanded to house the bishop and his priests. Jones argues that there were eleven priests at St. Peter’s at the time of the foundation (28), but the evidence does not support a precise figure. Dyer argued from witness lists that there were between nine and twenty-five cathedral clergy at St. Peter’s (Lords and Peasants 28). Nevertheless, it was a large area for such a small group and Jones describes the lives of these missionary priests: “They would probably have there a common dormitory, a common table, a common library, and to some extent a common purse” (49). Priests likely kept their residence at St. Peter’s year-round, while the bishop would have travelled often with his personal retinue. Robin Fleming argues that the priests, because they were ecclesiastical, stayed put year round rather than traveling between tribute centers as did their high-status counterparts among the
laity (244). The other major early church in Worcester was St. Helen's, which may have been a surviving Roman structure that was repurposed by the new diocese of Worcester. St. Alban's and St. Margaret's were added in the eighth century. Each of these churches was home to a community of clergy and their families. Baker and Richard Holt point out that Worcester had a higher population than many contemporary settlements (Urban Growth 128-9). A permanent ecclesiastical population required food, wood, and shelter year round, along with storage facilities and animal pens. A small army of resident, low-status workers would have supported Worcester's professional religious community, all under the lordship of the bishop.

The bishop's authority in the city Worcester and its cathedral precincts was, in spiritual and economic matters, close to absolute. For the first century of the diocese, the bishop of Worcester and his community maintained a military retinue and “any economic development of the site would have occurred at their instigation

10 See also, Baker and Holt, Urban Growth (128).

11 Nigel Baker used archeological evidence and parish boundaries to argue for a pre-Anglo-Saxon date for St. Helens and to suggest a chronology for the other medieval churches within Worcester’s late medieval walls (43-4). According to Bassett, St. Helen's parish was "a discrete territory round the former Roman town of Worcester which by stages passed almost entirely from royal ownership to the Church’s during the middle Saxon period" ("Churches in Worcester before and after the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons" 240).

12 On the bishop's lordship over the city of Worcester and cathedral precincts, see Baker and Holt, Urban Growth (128-30). They write, "In the earliest centuries the Church of Worcester was the city." Charter evidence supports the theory that the bishop was the lord of Worcester. S 172, a charter issued by Coenwulf of Mercia in 814, remitted to the Bishop Deneberht the cost of maintaining twelve men (likely soldiers) due from the city of Worcester. Sims-Williams argues this tax relief from burdens due by the city demonstrate that the bishop of Worcester was ultimately responsible for the administration of the city (Religion and Literature 132).
or at least under their authority” (Baker and Holt *Urban Growth* 128). The majority of early Worcester charters record exemptions from taxes and duties or alienate land by royal grant into ecclesiastical ownership. At its foundation, the Worcester diocese likely received a modest donation to sustain its activities. Nobles who established a new church or monastery endowed it with sufficient land to function and prosper. The earliest recorded grant for Worcester is from thirteen years after its foundation in AD 693 (S 53). There were surely many earlier grants that are now lost. We know they existed because later charters make incidental references to the following estates given to the Church between 680 and 693: Tolladine, Kempsey, Tapenhall, Bredicot, Churchill, Claines, Stoulton, Hindlip, Cudley, Lippard, Perry, Battenhall, Spetchley, Tiberton, Ravenshill, Warndon, and White Ladies Aston.13 Most of these estates were on the east side of the Severn adjacent to the city, indicating that the initial grants to the diocese were all Hwiccian royal grants clustered around the cathedral. Further expansion came through Mercian diplomas.

Worcester’s acquisition of estates after their initial endowment required the diocese to deal the kingdom of Mercia, and through donations the bishops of Worcester began to accumulate woodland estates. King Æthelbald (716-57) issued several small grants to St. Peter’s, such as a grant in 716 of three hides of woodland

13 For more on the early history of these estates, see Jones, *Anglo-Saxon Worcester* (50). Hooke maps a number of these estates based on later charters. See *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds*. For example, her map of Stoulton is based on the bounds of S 1348, a tenth century charter.
at Woodchester, Gloucester. Two charters issued by Offa in the mid-eighth century were crucial to giving the Worcester diocese a foothold west across the Severn River. These estates were crucial to the development of regional markets, often referred to as wics by archaeologists, because they provided an essential foundation for later expansion. S 142 records a large estate at Wick given to Bishop Mildred of Worcester in 757. Estates with wic (river; river inlet) elements in their name tended to include fertile river pastures ideal for dairying, and this was likely the case at Wick (Hooke "Hinterlands" 41). There were seven such estates with wic elements around Worcester, possibly indicating continuity in resources and site activities. Another grant by Offa in 789 included similar features and records an estate at Broadwas given to the church at Worcester “for the use of the brethren for all time” (S 126). The boundary clause includes woodlands, marshes, ponds, and an ealdan dic ("old dyke") still visible today (Hooke Worcestershire 87). The presence of a wulfsead ("wolf pit") indicates efforts to protect livestock from wolves (Hooke Anglo-Saxon Landscape 163). Wick and Broadwas were located within an extensive area west of the Severn known as the Weogorena leah ("the woodland or woodland

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14 This charter was used in a lawsuit over the same woodland for a dispute in 896 that resulted in a new charter (S 1441) reasserting Worcester’s claim to the estate (Baker "Churches, Parishes and Early Medieval Topography" 35).

15 The wic element in place names has associations with market towns but according to David Wilson, “The question is not so much, it seems, of towns getting the suffix -wic, as of some places called -wic eventually becoming towns” (Wilson 115).

16 The charter is authentic, but some words in the bounds suggest an eleventh century date, indicating they may have been added later in the cartulary copy. See (Wormald Bede and the Conversion of England: The Charter Evidence 25). Scholarly opinion favors the authenticity of S 142, with the exception of Anton Scharer, who argues it is a forgery (236).
pasture belonging to the Weogoren”).\(^\text{17}\) This was a wooded area with pastures linked to Worcester estates in heavily cultivated areas east of the Severn that comprised the original Worcester endowment. The move to acquire estates on both sides of the Severn is consistent with the approach by Worcester’s bishops to acquire profitable estates with complimentary resources, but the generosity of Mercian kings is balanced by royal agendas that often work against the best interests of the diocese.

**Proprietary Monasteries and the Mercian Problem**

The relationship between the Worcester diocese and Mercian kings was not always harmonious. Efforts by the bishop of Worcester and English church at large to address the king of Mercia’s alleged abuses had mixed results. King Æthelbald was notorious for making claims on church lands. In 747 Æthelbald received a letter from Bishop Boniface “making specific complaints about the exorbitant demands the king made on ecclesiastical estates.”\(^\text{18}\) Among his alleged offenses was the appropriation of church revenue and conscripting monks to join work parties on royal halls and vills (Sims-Williams 135).\(^\text{19}\) The synod of Gumley two years later in 749 codified exemptions for bookland from all royal services apart from the construction of bridges, defenses, and later military service—a common burden

\(^{17}\) The Weogorena were a tribe likely overtaken by the Hwicce who occupied the area around Worcester (Hooke Anglo-Saxon Landscape 163).

\(^{18}\) For a translation of Boniface’s letter, see Dorothy Whitelock, English Historical Documents (836-40).

\(^{19}\) Barbara York points to similar claims by Boniface against King Osred of Northumbria (705-16). See Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England (190).
added during Offa’s reign (Yorke 269). Common burdens are often referenced in scholarship as the *trinoda necessitas* (“the three necessities”). The common burdens were a compromise because while they placed limitations on what duties charters could exempt, the burdens also placed limits on what a king could ask. The synod led directly to the standard immunity clause we find in charters after mid-eighth century. Gumley stabilized the definition of bookland moving forward but had unforeseen consequences for Worcester.

After the synod of Gumley, Mercian kings shifted royal policies governing the foundation and control of monasteries. Rather than granting them to the diocese, kings began to establish monasteries stocked with laymen or their own churchmen to circumvent and loosen Worcester’s control of the region. As Yorke argues, “It was part of the spirit of the times that monasteries were seen as personal possessions of rulers who had founded them and one of the ways of providing for the members of their family” (270). As a result, the thegn-abbot emerged as a new category of ecclesiastical figure within the diocese. The thegn-abbot was a layman or priest who was not affiliated with the diocese and who answered to the king. Worcester’s charters demonstrate that they saw these developments as a threat and they maneuvered through their documents to influence or seize control of monasteries through various means.

20 Bookland refers to any land held by charter. See Ann Williams, “Land Tenure” (277-8).

21 The phrase only appears in one charter (S 230).

22 An immunity clause in a charter relieves an estate from worldly responsibilities. Brooks argues immunity clauses appearing in Worcester charters before the synod of Gumley in 749 are often of doubtful authenticity (“Development” 77).
The acquisition and development of monasteries was a key function of Worcester's charters in the eighth and ninth centuries. Independent monasteries threatened the see's ecclesiastical authority and also opened the door to greater secular influence on the estates that surrounded them. Worcester's charters evidence strategic planning that brought both secular, proprietary monasteries and older independent religious houses under the direct control of the bishop and the diocese. Bookland placed limits on royal duties that the king could place on the Church, and the diocese saw monasteries under lay control as a transparent tactic by the king to get around land tenure by directing profits from royal monasteries directly to the king. Likewise, independent monasteries that were self-sustaining had limited pastoral and economic ties to Worcester. The diocese secured control of many of these religious communities both to bring all religious activity in the West Midlands under their stewardship and to create an administrative network of regional hubs that could direct land use and support an emerging market in Worcester. The following account illustrates that Worcester secured royal and independent monasteries through various means including expensive exchanges of land, taxation, and legal challenges that stretched over generations.

King Offa founded several proprietary monasteries in the Worcester diocese that answered directly to the king and circumvented the authority of the bishop of Worcester. Monastic foundations were part of a multi-faceted strategy by Offa to reform his image with the Church. 23 These reforms, however, often worked against

23 See Yorke, Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England (269).
the interests of the diocese of Worcester. For example, Alcuin praised Offa for his efforts to support the church (Dümmel no. 101). Offa built and dedicated a number of churches to St. Peter and promised payments to Rome of 365 mancuses (Levinson 29-32; 257-8). Barbara Yorke argues that these efforts demonstrate an understanding "what was expected of a Christian ruler in the climate of the Carolingian Renaissance " (269). However, what benefited Rome did not necessarily benefit the diocese of Worcester. Yorke speaks of these matters in global terms, but locally, Mercian kings established monasteries for reasons other than expressions of faith. Proprietary monasteries provided kings a means to reward thegns or family members, and Offa obtained a papal privilege that allowed him to keep several monasteries as permanent possessions for himself, his wife, and his descendants (Levinson 30-2). Secular monasteries also compensated for revenue the king lost with the advent of bookland. Independent monasteries also seemed more likely to align with the king than the diocese. Monasteries at Winchcombe, Berkeley, and Kempsey illustrate that bishops of Worcester used charters to influence rival religious houses by pursuing all legal options including taxation, seizure, and the strategic appointments of abbots aligned with the diocese.

Winchcombe monastery had close associations with the king and acquired lesser monasteriola that increased its prestige and revenue. Efforts by kings to prop up monasteries like Winchcombe extended beyond gestures of piety. Winchcombe was founded by King Offa in 787, likely as a double monastery, and Offa’s widow Cynethryth may have served as abbess there sometime in the ninth
century (Darlington 111). King Coenwulf (796-821), made Winchcombe his chief royal monastery and appointed his relative Ælfflæd to rule there (Sims-Williams Religion and Literature 167). Coenwulf added a monastery at Twynning as a monasteriola and built the church of St. Mary, where he would be buried (Sims-Williams Religion and Literature 41-2). In an effort to maintain control, Coenwulf obtained papal privileges, and documents that confirmed his proprietary rights over Winchcombe and other monasteries he “justly acquired” were likely kept at the monastery (Sims-Williams Religion and Literature 167). Winchcombe is mentioned in S 1436 as the location of the archives of the Mercian royal house (Whybra 10). Large land holdings, familial connections to the Mercian royal house, and the strength of a royal archive allowed Winchcombe to maintain its prestige and independence despite pressure from Worcester’s bishops. However, the diocese found ways to extract revenue from even the strongest independent monasteries in Gloucestershire.

Bishops could draw on the resources of the monasteries within their diocese regardless of whether they controlled them. Cheltenham and Beckford were two of the many independent monasteries in Gloucestershire in Gloucestershire founded in the late eighth century. In 803, Bishop Denebehrt of Worcester claimed yearly

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24 S 167 records a separate foundation of a monastery at Winchcombe by Coenwulf but it is likely the charter, which survives as a cartulary copy, is a misunderstanding of a grant that added to the existing double monastery (Cubitt 284).

25 On their foundation, see Sims-Williams, Religion and Literature (138-9). There is no record of who founded the monasteries at Cheltenham and Beckford or when but the reference in S 1281 to the monasteries existing for thirty years without contributing to the bishop’s feorm places its foundation around 773.
food rent, *suam pastum*, from Cheltenham and Beckford by episcopal right. 26 S 1431 records a dispute between bishops of Hereford and Worcester over these rights (Adams et al. 320-1). In the charter, Deneberht demanded his right for food rent but Wulfheard, bishop of Hereford, argued that such payments had not been made in at least thirty years and were unwarranted. As a compromise, Deneberht gave up half of his right to the food rent by receiving alternating yearly payments from Cheltenham and Beckford. 27 Deneberht’s motivations seem to be economic and not a manifestation of the rivalries between bishops and monasteries seen on the continent over spiritual matters. Sims-Williams writes that monasteries and the diocese “grew up together and needed to make common cause against lay power” (*Religion and Literature* 139). 28 Indeed, there is no evidence of conflict over the monastic rule between Gloucestershire’s independent monasteries and the bishops. Deneberht is following a common strategy of Worcester’s ninth century bishops to establish economic ties with assets that later could be converted to episcopal estates. 29

26 For the history of *suam pastum*, see Stenton and Parsons, *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England* (187 n.1).

27 Nicholas Brooks identifies these episcopal rights with the *seruitium episcopi* bemoaned in Kent (Brooks *Canterbury* 176-7).

28 Sims-Williams contrasts the relationship of bishops and monasteries seen here with the contentious relationships between clerical and monastic foundations in Columbanus’ Gaul and post-Conquest England (*Religion and Literature* 139).

29 The diocese did eventually assume control of Cheltenham and Beckford. Bishop Oswald leased out part of the estates in 967 (S 1314). See Dyer, “St Oswald and 10,000 West Midland Peasants” for comments on the charter (179).
Berkeley, probably the largest independent monastery in Gloucestershire, had a more tumultuous relationship with the Worcester diocese. Like most independent monasteries, the foundation of Berkeley is not recorded but the first charters to mention it imply that it was a large, well-developed monastery.

A succession of Worcester’s bishops methodically turned to its charters secure a controlling interest of Berkeley. The earliest extant example of their litigious relationship is the contested inheritance of a layman Æthelric, son of Æthelmund and ealdorman of the Hwicce. In his will recorded by charter in AD 804, Æthelric recalled that a synod at Clofesho gave him the right to freely bequeath an estate at Westbury (S 1187). Æthelric leaves estates at Westbury (Westbury-on-Trym) and Stoke (Stoke Bishop) to his mother Ceolburg with reversion to Worcester. Æthelric's will includes a direct refutation of claims by Berkeley to these estates. Worcester eventually secured Westbury and Stoke but not without intense opposition from Berkeley, just as Æthelric's will had predicted (Sims-Williams Religion and Literature 176). An 824 charter records a dispute between Worcester and Berkeley concerning Westbury-on-Trym, settled in favor of the bishop, “who

30 Offa granted 55 hides at Westbury to Æthelric's father Æthelmund between 793 and 796. See S 139. For background on the estate, see Patrick Wormald, How Do We Know So Much about Anglo-Saxon Deerhurst? (220-2).

31 Sawyer 1187 was copied in the Worcester archive because it records this claim to Westbury, Stoke, and grants of land near Gloucester (Bromsgrove and thirty hides at Under Ofre) that he bequeathed directly to the diocese.

32 Æthelric leaves his estates to his mother “that she may have [the estates] for her life and afterwards give it to the church of Worcester; that on this account she may while she lives have there protection and defense against the claims of the Berkeley people.” (S 1187).
had the land with its charters, just as Æthelric had ordered it was to revert to the church of Worcester” (S 1433; Whitelock no. 84).

Despite Archbishop Wulfred’s ruling in favor of the Worcester diocese, there is evidence that conflict between Berkeley monastery and Worcester’s bishops over these estates continued. In fact, the diocese was so uncertain that their claim was strong enough that they resorted to forgery. S 146 claims a reversion of sixty hides at Westbury-on-Trym and ten hides at Henbury in the name of Offa after the death of himself and his son Ecgfrith. The charter includes a date of 793. However, Simon Keynes points to an early ninth century date for the charter (Keynes “The Councils of ‘Clofesho’” 27). The circumstances of the forgery indicate that its main function was to strengthen Worcester’s case for Westbury. Patrick Wormald identifies genuine elements with respect to Henbury, which indicates that land at Westbury was incorporated into a genuine charter (“Charters” 152-7). Despite these efforts by Worcester’s bishops to strengthen their claim, Berkeley monastery controlled some parts of Stoke and Westbury for much of the ninth century.

The bishops of Worcester, however, would continue to maneuver by making deft use of charters. In 883, Æthelred, ealdorman of the Mercians negotiated for the return of twelve hides at Stoke Bishop from Æthelhun, abbot of Berkeley (S 218). The estate would revert to the see after three lives. Given that Westbury was assessed at forty-three hides during this period, the additional twelve hides comprise the entire fifty-five hides that Offa originally granted to Æthelmund (Walker 76). A charter of Æthelred, ealdorman of Mercia, in 883 marked the end of
nearly one hundred years of sporadic litigation between Worcester and Berkeley (S 218).

Powerful independent monasteries presented challenges to the Worcester diocese throughout its history. These are not like the simple grants that comprised Worcester’s initial endowment. The diocese was competing against proprietary monasteries with strong ties to the king. The events at Berkeley also demonstrate Worcester’s determination to exert rights over competing interests in their territory, even over many generations. For monasteries under their direct control, bishops in Worcester maximized their influence through strategic appointments of abbots sympathetic to the diocese. Kempsey makes its first extant documentary appearance in a pair of charters from AD 799. The first charter, S 154, records King Cenwulf’s grant of land belonging to Kempsey minster to Abbot Balthun in exchange for land at Harvington (Sims-Williams Religion and Literature 171). Abbot Balthun is described in another charter as an alumnus of Worcester and a "dear and faithful friend of that congregation" (S 1262). In the second Kempsey charter, Finberg 238, the cathedral community of Worcester granted Bishop Deneberht (d. 822) an estate at Kempsey for two lives, with reversion to the diocese.33 Appointing a priest from Worcester as the Abbot of Kempsey was in Bishop Deneberht’s interests because a priest he ordained would be more answerable to the diocese than a priest from outside the community (Sims-Williams Religion and Literature 170).

33 The original of this Kempsey charter was lost sometime after 1655, and survives only as a 17th century transcription. It is not recorded by Sawyer. See Dugdale I, p. 608 and Finberg, The Early Charters of the West Midlands, no. 238.
Kempsey also exemplifies the flexible definition of *monestarium* and *mynster* in this period. *Monasterium* could signify an independent monastic community under an abbot without ties to the diocese, or the abbot could be a priest ordained by the bishop from the episcopal *familia*. These latter satellite minsters linked small estates to a central parish hub. Such was the case at Kempsey; estates answered directly to the diocese and would support it through yearly food rents in exchange for the leverage and representation that the bishop of Worcester could provide them. In Kempsey, Abbot Balthun also rewarded his former community by bequeathing his monastery to the diocese. In 868, Bishop Ealhhun dedicated a new church there to St. Andrew intended to serve as an episcopal manor. Worcester’s control of Kempsey seems to have continued throughout the Anglo-Saxon period; the Domesday Book shows that in 1086 thirteen of Kempsey’s twenty-four hides were part of the episcopal estate (Robertson 360).

According to Patrick Sims-Williams, Worcester’s network of episcopal minsters was assembled gradually through isolated transactions, and there is no “obviously ancient planned matrix behind it” (172). He argues the diocese acquired these monasteries from independent components “through the wishes of their founders and abbots and abbesses, through the intermittent piety of Hwiccian or Mercian rulers and through tenacious episcopal litigation” (169). It is true the

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35 This is likely the same episcopal manor referenced in S 1332, an AD 977 grant in which Bishop Oswald attached *hwætlande* (“wheat-growing land”) at Wolverton to his manor at Kempsey for Æthelwold, his *cnhit* (“knight”).
monasteries were acquired through various means. However, charters clearly reveal a plan behind Worcester's efforts. Monasteries like Winchecombe and Berkeley were firmly entrenched institutions backed up by wealth and royal connections. Control of these monasteries could not be achieved through a single charter in the same way a bishop could secure a ten hide estate. Bishops knew they could not always impose their will on monasteries as they did with Kempsey, but through legal challenges and creative maneuvers pursued over the course of years, the see chipped away at autonomous ecclesiastical rivals.

**Monastic Administration and Linked Estates**

The strategic goals of monastery acquisition and development are visible not only through politics or pastoral concerns but also through local economies directed from minster churches in support of an emerging regional market in Worcester. Those goals are visible from above as we view how regional networks operate in charters and from below as we follow material evidence for commodities like timber and salt. Land use initiatives in Worcestershire and surrounding areas coincided with structural developments occurring across Anglo-Saxon England. As John Blair points out, "By the mid 8th century, all or most of the English kingdoms had established a network of minster parochiae, typically covering between five and fifteen modern parishes and served by a groups of itinerating priests from the central church" (*Early Medieval Surrey* 91). Hooke argues that estate linkages were the basis for minor ecclesiastical divisions and that "the ecclesiastical unit of the parish seems to have been superimposed on the pattern of larger estates and their
smaller components” (Anglo-Saxon Landscape 87; 135). Worcester developed monasticism at sites like Winchcombe, Berkeley, and Kempsey to varying degrees but that control found expression in more than pastoral life. Monasteries often became regional hubs for commerce and land management. By 800, charter evidence shows Worcester controlled such monasteries at Stour in Ismere, Wooten Wawen, Penintanham (probably Inkberrow), Hampton Lucy, Stratford, Ripple, Bishop’s Cleeve, and Fladbury.36 As Worcester expanded its reach into these rural areas, it amassed wealth that stimulated the local economy by creating a regular market for rural produce (Baker and Holt 129). The pastoral framework built around minster churches manifested in economic terms through monasteries that served as regional hubs that increased agricultural and industrial efficiency to direct surplus and profit towards an emerging market in Worcester. Commercial life in rural zones comes into view in documentary evidence in two contexts: the development and maintenance of monasteries that streamlined the administration of rural estates and through the regulation of local resources and commodities like salt.

Remote wooded estates linked to Fladbury demonstrate how Worcester paired estates with complementary resources around a central monastery. Alan Everitt demonstrated estate linkages based on resources in Kent where river settlements were attached to wolds through outlying pastures (6). Fladbury monastery is recorded in charters as Fledanburg, “Flæde’s burh,” and Fleferð, likely

36 For commentary on charter evidence for these monasteries, see Hooke, The Anglo-Saxon Landscape (28-31).
“the wooded land of Flæde.” The Fladbury economy was based on moving stock from predominantly agricultural areas to the summer pastures of these woodland estates. Roads along the parish boundary of Worcester and Evesham indicate movement of stock from Evesham’s heavily cultivated estates south of the River Avon to Fladbury pastures controlled by Worcester. Fladbury is located along the River Avon to the southeast of Worcester and first appears in the documentary record in a lost charter recorded by Dugdale (I. 607). In this 691 grant, S 77, Æthelred, king of Mercia, transferred an estate at Fladbury along with a shed and two salt furnaces at to Oftfor, bishop of Worcester (Finberg 197). A second charter, S 76, reconfirmed this grant and added 44 hides, so that “monastic life may be re-established there as when the place was first granted.” By the time this estate took hold, Fladbury had emerged as a township with links to wooded estates to the north.

Bishop Ecgwine, Oftfor's successor, leased the monastery at Fladbury to a Hwiccian prince Æthelheard in return for twenty hides at Stratford (S 1252). Furthermore, the monastery would revert to the see at Worcester after Æthelheard’s death. This careful estate planning allowed Fladbury to emerge as a manorial nucleus with direct control over at least nine estates to the north for a radius of approximately five miles. Roads marked the parish boundaries of Fladbury, Wyre, Piddle, and Throckmorton within the large Fladbury estate (Hooke Anglo-Saxon Landscape 62). Timber and wood pastures were the dominant economic assets of the Fladbury estates. Ecgwine records his land use plan for the region in S 1250 and S 1251. According to the charters, in 714 he acquired estates
along the banks of the River Avon would have brought between fifty and one hundred hides under the control of the minster at Evesham. As Offfor’s successor at Evesham, Ecgwine had authority over both Evesham and Fladbury. This gave him a power base on both sides of the River Avon. Finberg believes that S 1251 is an “inflated version” of Sawyer 1250, that adds estates to the original grant, although S 1251 also includes a more convincing account of the benefactions (West Midlands 84). The attestations in Sawyer 1250 are problematic because Kings Coenred and Offa both abdicated and went to Rome in 709 (Finberg 33). These charters are from the Evesham archive, and it is not surprising to find such a sweeping acquisition in Ecgwine’s own collection. Despite the inconsistencies, the trade relationships indicated by parish boundaries and surviving roads, and corroborations in Worcester charters give a general impression of trade and estate planning between linked estates on both sides of the Avon.

Rural monasteries directed estate activities towards an emerging urban market in Worcester; in documentary evidence, the emergence of that market is most clearly articulated in the salt trade. Droitwich was the most prominent early source of inland salt that had been exploited since the Roman period. From the founding of the see at Worcester, salt from Droitwich was an important resource. The earliest documentary reference to Droitwich salt is a seventh century grant of fifty hides at Hanbury from King Wulfhere to Abbot Colman that includes “salt pit”

37 David Dumville argues that the charter can be disregarded as spurious. See Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar (41-2).

38 For more on Droitwich, see Hooke, “The Droitwich Salt Industry.”
rights (S 1822). Droitwich is the only known site that matches that description, but it is not until later that we find evidence of industrial scale production.

In the eighth century, charters record exchanges of land and facilities in support of the salt trade. The ovens were housed in simple structures referred to in charters as *casulae*. Two charters in AD 716 x 717 record Æthelbald’s acquisition of salt works on the north bank of River Salwarpe and part of a building at Droitwich in exchange for land *in qua sal confici* (“in which salt is able to be made”) (S 102; S 97). Another eighth century charter grants part of a building with two salt furnaces (S 1824). The division of salt production rights amongst a number of investors indicates the complexity of the Worcestershire salt market. Capital investment in the form of land in Æthelbald’s case facilitated entry into this lucrative trade. Rights to salt were also exchanged with outlying estates that supplied timber to fuel the ovens used to boil brine. By 1086, forty distinct estates in Worcestershire possessed *salinae* (“salt works”), and there were at least 200 of these facilities in operation. Based on Domesday evidence, F.J. Monkhouse placed this number at “at least 305” (252). The conventional unit of measure for salt was the mitt, and by Hooke’s calculation it took approximately 100 cartloads of wood to produce 100 mitts of salt (*Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 124). Salt rent could only be paid with the necessary wood in exchange. Bromsgrove regularly received “300 mitts of salt for which they received 300 cartloads of wood by the keepers of the wood” (124).

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39 The Droitwich salt trade extended well beyond Worcester estates; eleven Herfordshire estates and three Shropshire estates held rights there before 1086 (Hooke *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 123).
To meet this fuel demand, coppicing was implemented in Worcestershire to produce quickly renewable charcoal. A charter boundary clause at the River Salwarpe near Droitwich refers to two _col_ ("charcoal") fords (S 1596). The charter lists _viii acres æt colforda_. _Pæt swæ eft on colforda_ ("eight acres at colford, so that thus again to colford"). The place-name _colford_ indicates this was a site where coal was transported across the river for use in salt furnaces mentioned later in the charter:

> at Netherwich 4 places for vats and 8 rings of brine, 5 on the east side and three on the west side, and at Middlewich 8 places for vats, and the brine belonging to it which make be very useful, and unseparated brine. (S 1596)

*Col* burned at a higher temperature than unprocessed timber and could more efficiently evaporate water from the brine. Coppicing was also more labor intensive than collecting naturally occurring timber. To effectively coppice a span of woodland, "managed groves would have needed to be enclosed at different stages of the coppice cycle" to exclude animals (Hooke *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England* 157).

One asset charters that reference salt do not discuss is labor but a massive labor force would have been necessary to cut timber, prepare charcoal, transport both, operate salt furnaces, and move salt to market.

We see traces of the labor force in the taxes the salters paid. Charters of the ninth century reveal a system of taxation that took full advantage of the lucrative salt industry taking place in Droitwich through a toll system on the routes followed by salt traders across and beyond Worcestershire. Three Warwickshire charters refer to a _sealtstret_ ("salt road") as a boundary feature (S 1388; S 588; and S 892).
The *straet* term used to describe these routes “indicate that they were made up roads (Hooke *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 125-6). Other routes extended into northern Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, and Somerset. Salt taken by cartload or pack-course was subject to a toll at Droitwich referenced in charters as *wægn scilling*, “wagon-shilling” or *seam pending*, “pack-load penny.” In an 844 charter, the rights to tolls are specifically omitted from the rights at Worcester that Æthelred granted to the church of St. Peter (S 223). The church had rights to all other monetary transactions. Wider trade and taxes also hastened the transition to money as a more common medium of exchange. To avoid costs associated with cartage and taxes, distant estates sold their wood locally and used the money for local wood to acquire salt, a practice which may have stimulated the minting of coins (Hooke *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 124). Rural wood sales illustrate that the Worcester diocese was developing a complex rural economy that required rigorous local management of tolls and competing land use demands. Monasteries allowed Worcester to disperse their power into rural zones through charters that could increase productivity, generate tax revenue, and create an urban market for surplus rural produce.

**Mercian Decline and Challenges to Ecclesiastical Order**

This chapter has analyzed the ways in which Worcester’s bishops used charters to manage and compete with rival religious institutions. The maintenance of the salt trade demonstrates the precision with which the diocese managed commerce and resources. Charters outlined all phases of the salt industry from production to delivery to use. Networks of linked estates with complementary
resources were directed from monasteries that enacted the policies of bishops recorded in charters regarding both commodities (timber, salt, and produce) and land use (pasturing and field systems). The Worcester diocese is an ecclesiastical body that from its foundation sought financial independence and prosperity through its legal instruments. Charters allowed Worcester to adapt and thrive regardless of political conditions or outside pressures. Losses in autonomy to aggressive Mercian kings were balanced by gains in efficiency through regional monasteries and a growing urban marketplace. The next chapter explores the limits of Worcester’s flexibility during the decline of the Mercian dynasty, Viking invasions, and the rise of a new political order in Wessex. No longer could the diocese count on large royal donations to expand its wealth, nor would political circumstances allow them complete control of their cathedral precinct they ruled since their foundation. In response, Worcester’s bishops looked to charters to test the limits of bookland and negotiate for a system of fortifications that could protect their interests.
CHAPTER 3

MERCIA’S INHOSPITABLE END: BISHOPS OF WORCESTER IN THE AGE OF ALFRED

Charters record responses to political conditions; in chapter 2, we saw how the bishops of Worcester used charters to secure and control a network of estates and monasteries that could direct revenue towards emerging markets under the bishop’s control. By the mid-ninth century, the Worcester diocese had accumulated an extensive landed endowment across Worcestershire, Warwickshire, and Gloucestershire from donations by Hwiccian and Mercian rulers. The see also controlled a cohort of independently founded minsters within the diocese, and these estates were under the direct control of the bishop. However, things were changing. Francesca Tinti points out “the era of generous endowment of the see with major new properties had long passed” (*Sustaining Belief* 10).¹ The late ninth century brought turmoil to the West Midlands. Viking incursions were a persistent threat and the center of political power in England shifted from Mercia to Wessex. In this era of uncertainty, the Worcester diocese arranged for the fortification of the cathedral city under the authority of King Alfred (849-99), a project that accelerated urbanization and combined elements of defense and trade. Bishop Alhun (c.845-872) and Bishop Wærferth (873-915) presided over the Worcester diocese during these pivotal events, and through their charters, they

¹ Tinti identifies the eighth century as an era of major donations to the Worcester diocese. See *Sustaining Belief* (11).
introduced a number of innovations that freed estates from secular obligations and promoted economic growth.

Much of the scholarly work on late ninth- and early tenth-century Worcester uses charters to trace changes in the relationship between the Worcester diocese and secular authority. In this period, the Mercian dynasty collapsed and a new political order took over in Mercia based in Wessex and ruled by King Alfred. Charters record the efforts of Alhhun and Wærferth to improve the economic position of the Worcester diocese under late Mercian kings; these documents also show how Wærferth adapted his strategies in response to the new regime in Wessex. The intersection of these political and economic developments with changes in religious life has, I think, been insufficiently examined. I regard Tinti’s *Sustaining Belief: the Church of Worcester from c.870-c.1100*, published in 2010, as the model for new work in the field; her book shows what can be achieved through close analysis of the programs of individual bishops in Worcester. These ecclesiastics asserted fiscal rights and privileges in the context of their spiritual mission, as Tinti shows. She sees limits on what charters can teach us about the religious life for the cathedral community of Worcester in the late ninth and early tenth centuries:

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2 See Patrick Sims-Williams, Religion and Literature; Francesca Tinti, Sustaining Belief; Nigel Baker and Richard Holt, Urban Growth and the Medieval Church; and Barbara Yorke, Kings and Kingdoms in Early Anglo-Saxon England.

Modern historians agree that this was not yet a ‘monastic’ community, at least not by modern standards. Not enough manuscripts have survived to establish anything more specific about what type of rule (if any) was followed and what type of liturgical regime practiced at the time. (Sustaining Belief 15)

If Worcester is not yet a monastic community by “modern standards,” what was it instead? Historians looking for the characteristic elements of monastic life in the later Middle Ages will not find it in early tenth-century Worcester.⁴ Extant charters clearly show that Alhhun and Wærferth presided over the diocese during a precarious political transition. The Mercian dynasty, with whom the diocese always had a lukewarm relationship, was embattled by Viking invasions and on the decline, later to be replaced by a new West Saxon political order. Charters demonstrate how the bishops of Worcester were able to adapt and prosper during these troubled times and emerge as the architects and beneficiaries of a complex trade network based in Worcester that reached across the diocese and beyond. The charters of Alhhun and Wærferth have, unsurprisingly, an economic focus, but there are traces of religious implications in their grants that would develop more fully under later bishops.

I pursue an account of economic and religious life in Worcester under Alhhun and Wærferth in four parts. First, I analyze the decline of the Mercian royal house as a period of prosperity for the Worcester diocese. Bishop Alhhun leveraged his favorable position to purchase royal exemptions from pasturing and burdens of

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hospitality for his estates. Second, I explore the changes in charters under Bishop Wærferth, whose negotiations over bookland with the Mercian kings Burgred and Ceolwulf II followed along lines similar to those taken by his predecessor, Alhhun, but with important differences. In the third part, I outline the developments in local trade after Worcester fortified in 889, an endeavor that combined elements of defense and commerce and created a system of shared governance between the bishop and Alfred’s ealdorman Æthelred and his wife Æthelflæd. Last, I assess how Bishop Wærferth leveraged his close ties to King Alfred in his favor through royal councils and trade agreements that expanded the economic footprint of the diocese to markets in London. These four developments had many political and fiscal consequences for the Worcester diocese; in this section I also explore the religious implications that lie beneath the surface of Alhhun and Wærferth’s charters.

**Easing the Secular Burdens of Monastic Life**

The authority of the Worcester see over estates and the market reached its apex under King Burgred (852-74), one of the last independent rulers of Mercia. Through Burgred’s charters, Bishop Alhhun (845/48- 872) acquired new estates in Bath and London, obtained exemptions from pasturing the king’s livestock, and purchased relief from burdens of hospitality. Only seven charters survive from Bishop Alhhun’s episcopate but his dealings with Burgred established principles that his successor Wærferth would continue. Alhhun leveraged Burgred’s need for

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5 Burdens of hospitality originate from an ancient system by which subjects entertained their king as he passed over the country. See Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred* (38).
large sums to pay off his enemies to secure estates in new areas. Pasturing and burdens of hospitality were a significant expense for ecclesiastical estates, but these obligations carried significance beyond financial considerations. Monasteries were obligated to serve in a variety of secular capacities. Blockley monastery provided logistical support for hunting, entertained foreign messengers, and cared for the king’s horses. Freeing Blockley from these burdens allowed Alhhun to remove secular distractions and direct his monks’ attention to their duties on the estate.

The Mercian dynasty’s tenuous hold on power in the late ninth century emboldened the Worcester diocese to pursue new rights for their estates. Burgred became king in 852. Nearly his entire reign was spent contending with external challenges to his authority. In the early years of his reign, he suppressed revolts from midland Britons on Mercia’s western border with the help of Æthelwulf, king of the West Saxons (Walker 48). However, his greatest challenge came with the arrival of Viking armies in 865. Three brothers (Ivar, Halfdan, and Ubbe) led a combined Viking force called the *micel here* (great raiding army) that advanced on Mercia after successful campaigns in East Anglia and Northumbria. In 868, the Vikings reached Nottingham on the river Trent unhindered and wintered in that fortress. Burgred opted against direct assault on the Viking position. Similar attacks against fortified Viking positions were disastrous in East Anglia and Northumbria.

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6 Alhhun’s charters are S 1272, S 201, S 206, S 207, S 1273, S 208, and S 210. For commentary on these charters, see Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape* (139;174). See also Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter* bounds for commentary on boundary clauses for a number of the charters.

7 On costs associated with pasturing and burdens of hospitality, see Dyer, *Lords and Peasants* (30-1).
Instead, Burgred elected to call for aide from Wessex for a siege. King Æthelred and his brother Alfred brought their army through Mercia to Nottingham (ASC 868-9). The siege had mixed results; there was no serious fighting and the Anglo-Saxons bought peace (Walker 51). Burgred likely made a short-term agreement for peace through cash payments. The lukewarm success of the siege of Nottingham was the first sign of a fracture between Mercia and Wessex and was their last joint military venture as independent kingdoms. Fortunately for the Worcester diocese, their major estates in western and southern Mercia stayed out of the Vikings’ reach, and Mercia as a whole did not experience the devastation of Viking invasions to the same degree as did East Anglia or Northumbria.

As the major landholder in the region, Bishop Alhhun used his wealth and influence to expand his holdings outside of the diocese in Oxfordshire and London. Burgred was more than willing to oblige and seems to have been more interested in the present than the future in his charters. He likely needed the money to pay his troops or pay off his enemies. At a synod in Bath in 864, Burgred granted an estate at Water Eaton in Oxfordshire in the Bath diocese “in return for precious objects worth 400 shillings and 100 sicli, with provision for an annual render of 30 shillings to be paid to the church at Eynsham” (S 210). The Bath synod likely included a number of other estates as well. S 1167 and S 1168 are late seventh century charters from the Bath archive that record grants to Folcarburh monastery of land near the

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8 See Ian Walker, Mercia and the Making of England for information on the siege of Nottingham (58).
river Cherwell. S 1368 is a forgery with an authentic basis that adds geographic specificity to S 1367 (Gelling *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley* no. 258).

Patrick Sims-Williams argues that S 1368 was drawn up specifically for the synod in 868, a meeting where he contends Burgred disposed of a number of Bath estates ("Continental" 3 n.2). When paired with the desperate political situation Burgred was facing at the time, these charters show that bishops throughout Mercia saw an opportunity to add to their estates.

Alhun also expanded his holdings in London, a place with very old connections to the Worcester diocese. In 743, the Mercian king Æthelbald (716-757) granted bishop Mildred (743-775) of Worcester remission of tolls due on two ships in London (S 98). Alhun obtained the first recorded property for the diocese in London and it had clear uses for trade. In 857, Burgred granted “a profitable little estate” at Celmundingchaga in London to Alhun (S 208). The estate is located near the west gate and includes a scale and weights to calculate tolls. Della Hooke argues that this charter, along with a number of other grants, indicates significant foreign trade moving through London at this time (*Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 117). David Pratt describes the exemption from royal tolls and liberties within London

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9 Both charters survive as cartulary copies. S 1367 is an authentic charter dated to 680 and is the earliest grant attested by both the bishop of the Hwicce and the bishop of Mangonsætan (Sims-Williams *Religion and Literature* 88).

10 Gelling argues that the charter is authentic and Patrick Wormald judges S 98 to be “broadly trustworthy” (*The Early Charters of the Thames Valley* no. 199; *Bede and the Conversion of England: The Charter Evidence* 25).

11 Dorothy Whitelock notes that they unusual name of the estate is a “clear instance of the ending with merely genitival force,” meaning that this estate is the haga of Ceolmund, the reeve from whom Burgred purchased the estate (529 n.2:3).
one of the most valuable royal gifts at the time because *Lundenwic* was “a place of aristocratic exchange; high status goods were acquired by the sale of specialist regional produce, transported by ship” (21). Alhhun’s expansion into London marked an important moment for the Worcester diocese, which would further develop this market under Wærferth in partnership with King Alfred and his Mercian proxies.

Alhhun’s other major charters focus on privileges and relief from burdens of hospitality for Worcester’s existing estates in exchange for payments to the king (S 206; S 207). The see at Worcester negotiated for these long-term rights to land from a favorable position. Bishop Alhhun’s administration restructured land use through sweeping reforms of networked estates. S 206 exemplifies how the bishop seized on the opportunity he saw in a cash poor king to use his wealth to consolidate privileges for a small cluster of estates across several counties.\(^\text{12}\) The charter makes an explicit reference to Viking invasions, highlighting Burgred’s desperate situation.\(^\text{13}\) Burgred granted privileges for a number of estates to Bishop Alhhun and his *familia* at Worcester. In 855, Worcester received permanent land use rights to estates at Poulton and Eisey, Wiltshire; Ablington and Barnsley, Gloucester; and relief from pasturing the king’s swine at Bentley, Worcester in exchange for two gold *bradiolae* (armlets) “of skilled workmanship” weighing between forty-five and

\(^\text{12}\) There is a broad scholarly consensus that S 206 is authentic (Finberg *West Midlands* no. 77; Stenton *Anglo-Saxon England* 243).

\(^\text{13}\) “…when the pagans were in the province of the Wrekin-dwellers” (Whitelock). Stenton uses the reference to track the movement of the Viking army and clarify ambiguities in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*Anglo-Saxon England* 243).
forty-eight mancuses.\textsuperscript{14} Hides recorded within parish-units had been the favored strategy for charters under previous administrations. With S 206, Alhun departs from leases organized at the parish level towards a model that allowed him to achieve a sweeping consolidation of privileges across a network of smaller estates (Hooke \textit{Anglo-Saxon Landscape} 108).

The estates recorded in S 206 are clustered along the Gloucester-Wiltshire border with the exception of Bentley, which is located several miles to the north (Whybra 40-41).\textsuperscript{15} That estate at Bentley, Worcestershire in S 206 stood to benefit significantly from its exemption. Three hides at Bentley on the western side of the Severn were freed from the pasturing of the king’s swine. In the Latin charter, the site is referred to in Old English as \textit{fernleswe} (fern-pasture). Prior to S 206, this pasture would have provided pannage for pigs under the care of royal swineherds. Comparisons to similarly sized pastures indicate that the \textit{fernleswe} could yield feed for between 75 and 150 swine.\textsuperscript{16} This would have put significant pressure on estate resources as the normal complement of swine on one of the bishop’s estates was between 30 and 60 (Hooke \textit{Anglo-Saxon Landscape} 156-7). Given the distance from the other estates in the grant, the pasture at Bentley was a detached seasonal pasture. Hooke argues that estate linkages were often based on the utilization of woodland resources ("Pre-Conquest Woodland" 117). We can surmise that Poulton,

\textsuperscript{14} A mancus weighed approximately 4.25 grams in this period (Grierson and Blackburn 327).

\textsuperscript{15} See Julian Whybra, \textit{A Lost English County} for maps of Ablingdon, Poulton, Bansley, Eisey and Bentley (40).

\textsuperscript{16} See S 1441. Pasturing capacity in the charter is discussed in reference to a lawsuit over use of the bishop’s woodland pasture at Longridge, Gloucestershire. See Pratt, \textit{Political Thought} (54).
Eisey, Ablington, and Barnsley all had significant numbers of swine and the freedom Worcester acquired for it in S 206 allowed the diocese to direct the pasture at Bentley towards their own use.

Although exclusive rights to wood pastures were a significant financial windfall for the Worcester diocese, relief from hospitality burdens impinged more directly on monastic life. Bishop Alhhun addressed these obligations through a charter for a monastery he likely also founded at Blockley. Nineth-century kings travelled regularly "between favored royal vills (tunas) and other centers" (Pratt 34). This system regulated the obligations of Blockley monastery to entertain the king and his company. Alhhun leveraged his political advantage with Burgred in S 207 to resist and augment traditional burdens of hospitality associated with bookland.

Judging by the freedoms enumerated in S 207, Blockley became a strategic site with heavy royal entertainment and military burdens. According to this document, Burgred freed the monastery

from the feeding and maintenance of all hawks and falcons in the land of the Mercians, and of all huntsmen of the king or ealdorman except those who are in the province of the Hwicce; likewise even from the feeding and maintenance of those men whom we call in Saxon “Walhfaereld” and from lodging them and from lodging all mounted men of the English race and foreigners, which of noble or humble birth. (Whitelock no. 91)

Bishop Alhhun purchased exemptions from these burdens for 300 shillings of silver.

17 On the foundation of Blockley, see Finberg, “Anglo-Saxon England to 1042” (394). Finberg argues that Blockley was founded shortly after King Æthelbald granted the adjacent estate at Batsford to Bishop Wilfrid of Worcester in 727. See also Gloucester Studies (6-7).

18 “Welsh expedition” is the literal translation of Walhfaereld but the meaning is ambiguous. It could mean the messengers who passed through England and Wales (Whitelock 528).
The foreigners mentioned in the grant could be a Welsh border patrol or messengers on their way to the king (Sims-Williams *Religion and Literature* 172).

The explicit costs mentioned in S 207—feeding and boarding the king's huntsmen and falconers—comprised only part of the expense involved in supporting a hunt. The maintenance of the *deorhege* (deer-fence) was the most labor intensive and expensive aspect of this hospitality burden. Della Hooke identifies the *deorhege* as a substantial (not necessarily living) fence that have been used to steer game, as opposed to less elaborate hedges around cropped ground (Hooke "Pre-Conquest Woodland" 125). Taken by itself, S 207 seems to be one of many cost-saving measures enacted by Worcester's bishops prone to use charters for long-range planning. However, other documentary and material evidence reveals that Blockley was a major monastery and Alhhun's efforts to sever ties with secular life are an early example of monastic reform.

S 207 is the first recorded reference to Blockely, a Winchcombe shire minster church within an extensive parish (Bassett "The Administrative Landscape of the Diocese of Worcester in the Tenth Century" 167). Burgred donated an estate at Blockley to Bishop Alhhun in 855. The estate was valued at approximately 50 hides according to an eleventh century calendar of grants.\(^\text{19}\) The significance of the estate at Blockley lies in its status as a *villam episcopalem*. This term "episcopal vill" was first applied to Blockley by Florence of Worcester and it led the 18th century historian William Thomas to classify the site as an episcopal palace for the bishops

\(^{19}\) BL, *Cotton MS*, Nero E.1, pt. ii, f. 184b
of Worcester (ii.94; Thomas 107). While we lack church fabric or contemporary
documents to support Thomas’ claim, there is strong evidence that this was a major
minster church within an extensive parish (Bassett "The Administrative Landscape
of the Diocese of Worcester in the Tenth Century" 167). Worcester held this
Blockley and the land it sits on from a very early date; however, S 207 says nothing
about how Worcester came to possess this large minster church outside of the
diocese. The area around Blockley was largely unoccupied in the mid-8th century,
but grew in significance enough to be a major minster church by 855 and the events
of S 207. Eilert Eckwall posits that the name Blockley signifies “Blocca’s woodland
clearing” (47). Blocca does not appear in any extant sources, but the clearing of this
woodland must have taken place at least a few generations before S 207 for Blockley
to develop into the spiritual headquarters of the district. Worcester’s seemingly
unbroken control of Batsford and other estates in the area implies that the diocese
was instrumental in the foundation of the monastery at Blockley. 20 Patrick Sims-
Williams supposes that the monastery at Blockley was built by Bishop Alhhun to
serve his Dorn-Batsford-Blockley estate (Religion and Literature 172). Alternatively,
Blockley was an independent foundation brought under Worcester’s control later. 21
This estate comprised a significant portion of the church at Worcester’s 300 hides in

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20 Worcester controlled Batsford until 1016 when Hemming records that it was stolen, along with
two other manors, by a powerful magnate Eadric Streona (Dugdale i, p. 598).

21 S 1442 records a settlement in 897 between the churches of Winchcombe and Worcester
concerning land at Upton in Blockley, indicating that Worcester’s control of land use in the region
was not without challenge. This charter is discussed in section 4 in the context of Wærferth’s
episcopate. See also Pratt, Political Thought (54).
Gloucestershire, 200 of which were assigned to the bishop and 100 to the monks of his cathedral priory.\textsuperscript{22}

Earlier documents help clarify the history of the estate at Blockley and reveal the monastery was likely founded by Worcester to serve a number of linked estates in Gloucestershire. In Sawyer 101, Æthelbald grants 8 hides at \textit{Bæcesshora} to Wilfrid, bishop of Worcester. While the charter is undated, it is attested by Bishop Weahlstod, who occupied the see at Hereford from 727 to 736. Early studies of Gloucester omit for misidentify S 101.\textsuperscript{23} Birch identified the place in S 101 as Paxford but comparisons to Domesday evidence clearly identify the estate \textit{Bæcesshora} as Batsford. H.P.R. Finberg offers detailed commentary on Batsford and its relationship to Blockley (\textit{Gloucestershire Studies} 5-8). The boundary clause of S 101 shows that the grant at Batsford included much of the territory in the Blockley grant recorded in S 207: “On the south [this property includes a great part of the hill; on the east it is enclosed by the king’s highway; on the north it is bordered by flowing waters; the west bounds it with certain marshes.”\textsuperscript{24} The name “king’s highway” in the boundary indicates that this was a significant roadway and can likely be identified with the Roman “Fosse Way.” Moving northward along the Fosse boundary takes us well out of Batsford and into Blockley until we reach Knee Brook

\textsuperscript{22} The 100 hides assigned to the cathedral priory are referenced in the \textit{Monasticon} as the Cuthbertslaw (Dugdale I, pp. 584, 608, 17).

\textsuperscript{23} S 101 and Batsford are never mentioned by G.B. Grundy in Saxon Charters and Field Names of Gloucestershire.

\textsuperscript{24} This charter offers a rare example of boundary clauses stated counterclockwise. See Hooke, “Pre-Conquest Woodland” (172).
and its junction with Blockley Brook. These brooks are the only significant water sources that could correspond to the “flowing waters” of the S 101 boundary clause. Finberg’s walk of the bounds demonstrates that the grant consisted of the entire parish of Batsford and the eastern half of Blockley (Finberg Gloucestershire Studies 8).

Blockley’s proximity to a major roadway, the “king’s highway,” and the hospitality burdens in S 207 reveal the secular role the monastery played from its foundation. Severing all secular ties at Blockley would represent a significant cost savings over the long haul, and S 207 is often read in those terms.\(^{25}\) Steven Bassett compares Blockley to “small late medieval colleges, which stood in a minster parish but played no part in its pastoral life” (“The Administrative Landscape” 166).\(^{26}\) However, there is more to S 207 than naked secular ambition to free an estate from costly burdens. Bishop Alhhun achieved immediate pastoral benefits in S 207. As we have seen thus far, bishops engage in long-term planning for their estates by arranging for conditions of transfer and use that would not yield results until several generations later. However, in the case of Blockley, removing all secular ties allowed the monastery to focus on its heavy administrative responsibilities over a parish that included Dorn and Batsford. The estate also had significant woodland resources to manage (Hooke "Pre-Conquest Woodland" 125). Freedom from hospitality burdens allowed Blockley to direct its energy towards its two-fold

\(^{25}\) See David Pelteret, Slavery in Early Mediaeval England (167 n.17).

\(^{26}\) For more on late medieval colleges, see C.N.L. Brooke, “Rural Ecclesiastical Institutions in England: the Search for their Origins.”
pastoral and economic mission for the Worcester diocese.

**Charters in the Last Years of Independent Mercia**

The convergence of pastoral and economic interests in charters continued and intensified under Alhhun’s successor, Bishop Wærferth, who saw the end of the Mercian dynasty and forged a partnership with King Alfred and his Mercian ealdorman Æthelred. Under Wærferth, royal diplomas were infused with a liturgical context, a new agenda that would influence later ecclesiastical charters. The Worcester diocese also broke free of obligations that had been attached to their estates by Mercian kings for over one hundred years. In two charters issued by Ceowulf II, S 215 and S 216, Wærferth made sweeping reforms to the relationship between bookland and the crown for all of his estates and laid the groundwork for monastic reforms that would take hold later.

As the tumultuous political situation in Mercia worsened, the Worcester diocese was able to push its advantage further with the arguably weaker King Ceolwulf II (d. 879). Wærferth guided the diocese through this dramatic political transition to create a stronger church that operated under secular authority but in a partnership that diminished secular interference in monastic life. Burgred went into exile in Rome after either being deposed by the Vikings or, possibly, by his own nobles. The final blows to Burgred’s rule came with the occupation of London and sack of Repton in 872 and 874, respectively (Stenton *Anglo-Saxon England* 252). The Vikings installed Ceolwulf II (d. 879) to replace Burgred in 874. Sources looked unfavorably on Ceolwulf II. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle question his legitimacy and
refers to him as “unwisæ cyninges þegne” (“foolish king’s thegn”); however, the coins and charters issued during his reign, along with his likely lineage with a former Mercian dynasty, indicate his legitimacy as a ruler in Mercia (Smyth 277).

Wærferth continued his predecessor Alhhun’s tactics in his dealings with Ceolwulf II and sought relief from royal obligations but was able to extend these privileges to the entire bishopric.

In 875, Bishop Wærferth secured an exemption recorded in S 215 from feeding the king’s horses and servants for estates across the entire Worcester diocese in return for liturgical services.27 The innovation of this charter is its scope. Typically, privileges were secured through charters piecemeal for a specific religious center or group of estates. The capacity of Wærferth to negotiate such a sweeping reform of estate obligations reveals the extent of his power over the diocese and his political advantage over the king (Tinti Sustaining Belief 11). The inclusion of liturgical services in the charter is a crucial early example that would carry on in Worcester’s tenth century charters. Whereas in earlier royal diplomas, assertions of the spiritual mission of the diocese occurred in formulas such as the invocation or sanction, here the religious act is brought into the dispositive section of the grant. Ceolwulf II receives liturgical services as a condition of the charter rather than as a nebulous and formulaic invocation of God. The charter directs religious practices.

27 For a translation of S 215, see Whitelock, English Historical Documents (no. 95). See Sims-Williams for comments on the liturgical services in the charter and a history of the estate (Religion and Literature 152).
In 922 Bishop Wilfrith (915-928) of Worcester used an episcopal charter, S 1289, to grant an estate at Clifford Chambers in perpetual inheritance “with all profits from fisheries and meadows which belong to it, on the condition that the remembrance of me in the sight of God be more steadfastly observed among them” (Robertson no. 21). Tinti argues that Wilfrith’s charter represents an important first step towards what is typically called the division of the *mensa*, a process where assets of a see were divided among the bishop and his community (15). However, while S 1289 marks an important step in these matters, it is not the first step.

Bishop Wærferth laid the foundation for later developments through S 215 and later charters that made it possible for the division of the *mensa* to occur. Clifford Chambers in S 1289 could only be effectively transferred to Wilfrith’s community because it had been freed of heavy secular burdens. Wærferth’s efforts, and Alhhun’s before him, to sever all secular ties for his estates allowed them to develop as ecclesiastical places. Free from the costs and distractions of secular life, Worcester’s bishops could transfer estates as they saw fit to members of their community or later to laymen while maintaining tight control of both the fiscal and pastoral activities at the site without any outside interference. Another grant by Ceolwulf II demonstrates the beginnings of a type of monasticism in the diocese identified with later periods. In 875, Ceolwulf granted Wærferth six hides at Overbury with *villulae* (small villas) at Conderdon and Pendock (S 216). The king

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28 Wilfrith’s dates are uncertain, as he is referenced in charters as alternatively being consecrated in 922. Cyril Hart argues that S 1289 is genuine despite the inclusion of bounds that reference the neighboring estate at Milcote (no. 52).
donates the estate and attached villas so that they “may be free from all human affairs and for the redemption of my soul.”

Although Overbury is located in an area called the Malvern wastes, it likely “offered seasonal grazing to estates located in richer agricultural areas (Hooke Anglo-Saxon Landscape 180). Wærferth established at Overbury an estate with all of the hallmarks of monastic communities we see later in the diocese. It was free of all secular ties and could be easily networked with existing estates that could make use of its resources. During the final years of the Mercian dynasty, Wærferth laid the foundation for further developments in the economy and monastic life of the Worcester diocese as it braced for an uncertain future under a new regime.

**West Saxon Rule and the Fortified Markets**

The collapse of the Mercian dynasty and the ascension of Wessex altered the political landscape for the Worcester diocese and forced Bishop Wærferth to reexamine his relationship to secular authority. Viking incursions into Mercia demonstrated how vulnerable the diocese really was after having enjoyed over a century of relative political stability under Mercian kings. King Alfred governed Mercia by proxy through powerful ealdormen with the unique authority to issue their own charters and negotiate trade and land use in royal councils attended by regional secular and ecclesiastical elites. Æthelred’s charters signal a transition in the diocese. Whereas previously charters were issued by a king distant from the

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29 My translation.

30 See Walker for Æthelred’s power to issue charters (72).
local affairs of the diocese, charters were now issued by a local agent of the king who governed directly.

The dominant secular elite in charters after the transition to West Saxon rule was Æthelred, ealdorman of Mercia (d. 911) and his wife Æthelflæd, daughter of King Alfred. Æthelred rose to power from uncertain origins during the chaotic last years of the Mercian dynasty, and his relationship with the Worcester diocese was favorable on the whole. In this new environment, Bishop Wærferth arranged for the fortification of Worcester and strengthened the diocese through vigorous defense of land use rights for his estates and expansion into growing a growing marketplace in London.

Soon after the death of King Ceolwulf II in 879, Æthelred emerged as the ruler of what remained of the former Mercian kingdom. We know almost nothing about Æthelred’s background and he does not appear in documentary records until 883. By then, Æthelred had pieced together remnants of the former Mercian kingdom and became the de facto ruler of all of English Mercia. No records survive to indicate how Æthelred achieved this, but according to Ian Walker he either weathered the storm and maintained control of his territory in the Hwicce or abandoned his lands and reclaimed them later (70). If Æthelred maintained control, he likely did not do so through open conflict with the Vikings because of his limited resources. Rulers in Northumbria and East Anglia had already tried open war with disastrous results (Walker 71). More likely, Æthelred would have paid protection

31 See S 218 and S 222. For commentary on these charters, see Bullough, “St Oswald: Monk, Bishop and Archbishop” (11). See also Keynes, “King Alfred and the Mercians” (20-7).
money to facilitate peace and get the Vikings to leave his lands. Alternatively, he may have collaborated with the Vikings in their conquests in exchange for leaving his lands untouched. Such a move was not unprecedented, having been employed by the Mercians in 869, 871, and 872 (Walker 72). Furthermore, according to an account in Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the Vikings invaded Mercia and forced a partition on King Ceolwulf II in 877 (Whitelock 200). As a result, Æthelred’s home base would have fallen into Viking control. Æthelred likely abandoned his lands and went into hiding or exile abroad until conditions were more favorable to reclaim them. When the Vikings had concentrated their efforts on Wessex and East Anglia, they probably left only a small contingent to monitor and hold western Mercia. After securing his own relatively intact and undamaged region of the Mercia, Æthelred likely assumed the authority of missing ealdormen or reached an agreement with those who survived but precariously held their territory (Keynes and Lapidge 34-5). This placed remaining ealdorman under Æthelred’s authority; they pledged service and loyalty in exchange for support and protection.

We can only surmise how the Worcester diocese fared during these events, although their early charters under Æthelred seem to indicate they came out of the crisis relatively unscathed. Given their immense wealth and stake in these events, we can assume the diocese contributed to the pooled resources of a new Mercian order led by Æthelred that effectively held off further Viking incursions and

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32 This entry for 877 is found in manuscript C of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. See Whitelock (200).

33 South Wales or Wessex were free of Vikings at the time and could have provided a safe haven. See Walker, Mercia and the Making of England (73).
established the ealdorman as a king in everything but name. The English Mercians regarded him as the rightful successor to earlier rulers, and he even took his newly constituted Mercian army on the offensive in neighboring territories. According to Asser’s *Life of King Alfred*, kings from Glywysing and Gwent, in south-eastern Wales, sought Alfred’s protection from Æthelred’s “might and tyrannical behavior” early in the 880s (§80). Simon Keynes points out that it is uncertain whether this incident indicates that Alfred already had authority over Æthelred or if the Welsh kings “hoped the reciprocal obligations of lordship would induce him to bring pressure to bear on the Mercian ruler” ("King Alfred and the Mercians" 20). Whatever the dynamics of their early relationship, it is clear that both rulers recognized the benefits of an alliance.

Alfred would come to be recognized as King in Mercia after he survived Viking incursions and reclaimed Wessex. However, Alfred never issued his own charters in Mercia, and he worked to strengthen Æthelred’s position by acknowledging his powers above those of other ealdormen. Although regarded by many as Alfred’s governor in Mercia, there is no evidence that Alfred appointed Æthelred to anything (Walker 77). Alfred was not granting Æthelred new powers but recognizing powers he already had. In fact, charter endorsements reveal that Æthelred won over members of the old nobility. The success of Alfred’s offensive against the Danes depended on a reconciliation of Wessex and Mercia, so Æthelred was granted the flexibility to manage his own affairs. The military partnership was

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34 For Asser’s life of Alfred, see Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser’s Life of King Alfred*. 
strengthened with a marriage partnership when Æthelred married Alfred’s daughter Æthelflæd, who was herself of Mercian descent.\(^{35}\)

Although documentary evidence reveals his relative autonomy in Mercia, Æthelred does not seem inclined to use charters to define a title or the range of his authority within Alfred’s administration. Most commonly, he is called dux or ealdormann, but at times is referred to subregulus or patricius. In Chronicles, laws, and charters, dux and ealdormann are equated and generally refer to a king’s subordinate (DOE). Anglo-Saxon laws put forward the clear distinction that ealdormen hold a rank between that of a king and thane, a status at or just below that of a bishop. There is flexibility within these terms—an ealdorman, dux, or subregulus report directly to a king or rule with a degree of autonomy over specific cities, kingdoms or people\(^{36}\). It was clear that any efforts by Wærferth to improve the position of the diocese would need to work through the battle-tested Æthelred and Wærferth continually opted for partnership over resistance.

The fortification of Worcester ushered in a new agenda for Worcester charters as attention shifted from large-scale local estate acquisition towards the management of existing holdings, sub-leases, and trade relationships in the West Midlands and beyond. Wærferth started a process where the Church would come to organize the emerging urban market at Worcester within a network of fortifications. The potential for economic growth and security of new fortifications enticed

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\(^{35}\) For a full account of the marriage and Æthelflæd’s Mercian lineage, see Walker, *Mercia* (77-80).

Wærferth to give up some control of the cathedral city in order to protect his assets and guarantee the safety of tenants wishing to engage in trade.

Through S 223, Wærferth and Æthelred, along with his wife Æthelflæd, solidified a partnership built on guarantees for protection and a revenue split in Worcester. This charter also marks Worcester’s transition from a rural Anglo-Saxon town to a fortified proto-urban trading center. The charter records an agreement made between 889 and 899—and approved by King Alfred—between Ealdorman Æthelred, his wife Æthelflæd, and the church of Worcester. Bishop Wærferth requested the construction of a burh (fortified enclosure) “for the protection of the people and also that the worship of God may be celebrated there in security.” Here the charter expresses that the fortifications protect both economic and religious interests. In exchange, Æthelred and Æthelflæd granted the church half of their rights of lordship in the city both inside and outside the fortifications. These rights included profits from land rents, tolls and fines. However, the King maintained full rights to customary tolls on salt passing through Worcester—a provision that was likely key to gaining Alfred’s consent (Harmer Anglo-Saxon Writs 410).

Although it had a long history of administrative activity, Worcester cannot be accurately classified as an urban center until it was fortified. Before the fortification program “central-place functions had probably been carried out at estate centers that were essentially rural in character” (Hooke Anglo-Saxon Landscape 114). The construction of fortifications in Worcester in the 890s made rural estates dependent on a regional market within a proto-urban center. Stenton points out that S 223
gives the impression that the market itself was new (Anglo-Saxon England 529). In the charter, it is claimed that defenses were necessary to protect the people and the cathedral. However, we also glean the impression that fortifications were not constructed to protect an existing market vulnerable to attack but rather to create a new well-defended commercial zone for tenants wishing to engage in trade (Tinti Sustaining Belief 11).

Profits in the form of land rent and judicial fees would be shared equally between the Æthelred, Æthelflæd, and the Wærferth. Baker and Holt argue that the charter permanently diminished the bishop's authority in Worcester by placing the burh under royal control because the rights to profits granted to the church by Æthelred and Æthelflæd were rights that the church held exclusively before construction of the fortifications (Baker and Holt 133). Tinti counters that these were newly created revenues, and the diocese was not losing anything (11 n.8). Furthermore, the Wærferth maintained full control of his land and rights outside of the market place. S 223 is an agreement that created a partnership between secular and ecclesiastical authority, not a secular takeover of the city. Wærferth seems to have a much better relationship with King Alfred than earlier bishops of Worcester had with Mercian kings.37

S 223 is in many ways set a new direction in Wærferth's efforts to reshape fiscal and monastic life in his diocese, and the elaborate liturgical commemoration of

37 Wærferth’s close association to Alfred is often discussed in reference to his participation in the king’s translation program. Wærferth translated Gregory the Great’s Dialogi into English. See Tinti, Sustaining Belief (12).
this charter clearly expresses his vision of religious life in Worcester moving forward. In addition to the provision for fortifications and revenue sharing, the religious community at Worcester pledge to commemorate their benefactors Æthelred and Æthelflæd:

And Bishop Wærferth and the community have appointed the following divine offices before the one which is performed daily, both during their lifetime and after their death: that the nocturn[e]s at vespers and at tierce, the psalm “De profundis” is always to be sung as long as they shall live, and after their death “Laudate Dominum”; and every Saturday in St Peter’s church, thirty psalms and a mass on their behalf [are to be sung] both during their lifetime and also after their death. (Harmer Select English Historical Documents 55)

Prayers, psalms, and masses are commonly offered in charters (Barrow "Friends and Friendship in Anglo-Saxon Charters" 116). However, this is an early and especially elaborate example of the liturgical program of the Worcester diocese. Through S 223, Wærferth expressed his vision for both the governance of Worcester and the spiritual responsibility of the diocese. The bishop expands on the traditional formulaic expressions of religious authority of early royal diplomas to in order to direct the spiritual life of his community.

Later charters put the diocese on firm financial footing by expanding Wærferth’s holdings in London, another recently fortified urban market. Æthelred, and Alfred, through S 346, granted property in London to Wærferth. Alfred had placed Æthelred in charge of London in 889, and both Æthelred and Bishop Wæferth of Worcester were major players in the restoration of London—a process Nigel Baker and Richard Holt identify as the most significant Anglo-Saxon land use
initiative of the ninth century (Urban Growth 134-5).38 Wærferth’s London property was called Hwætmundes stane and included “an urn (for measuring) and scales within for the purpose of weighing in buying or selling” (A. Jones 91-2). The details of the grant indicate that Wærferth, through S 346, expanded on the lucrative rights to tolls and fines within the city secured by his predecessor Alhhun in S 208. In fact, David Pratt points out the Wærferth’s “arrangements extended to a full carve-up of dues and fines, with half conceded to the episcopal church” (Pratt 306). A clear picture emerges as we pull back to parallel initiatives to fortify Bath, Gloucester, and many of the estates in between. Lucrative trading rights within a secure network offset any authority of governance that Wærferth lost in his diocese under West Saxon rule, and the bishop’s operations within a reformed legal system further evidence his pragmatic approach to his affairs.

**Land Disputes and Trade Agreements in the Mercian Witan**

The most telling aspect of Æthelred’s charters is not the titles ascribed to him, but rather his capacity to issue them. According to Keynes, the authority to issue his own charters separates him as uniquely powerful amongst contemporary ealdormen (“King Alfred and the Mercians 20). Alfred endorsed Æthelred’s charters, which were negotiated at Mercian witan (assemblies) of bishops, retainers and ealdormen. Despite Æthelred’s enhanced powers, Alfred’s overlordship in Mercia is unquestioned. Asser writes that Æthelred pledged “that in every respect he would be obedient to the royal will” (Asser §80). Indeed, in Sawyer 218 (AD 883) Æthelred

38 Alfred restored English rule to London in 886 and shortly after the city was fortified. See Baker and Holt, Urban Growth (132).
claims to act “with the permission and witness of King Alfred and all the councilors of the Mercians, ecclesiastical and lay.” Alfred left the day-to-day administration of Mercia to Æthelred, who seems to have issued his own charters for his own reasons. In response to these developments, Bishop Wærferth used the Mercian witan to negotiate suits and trade agreements. Alfred’s witan purposefully incorporated ecclesiastical figures in the proceedings. A law of Alfred declared episcopal witnesses as a necessity to prevent the wrongful disposal of bookland outside of the holder’s kindred (Liebermann 41). Two Worcester charters provide the only record of ecclesiastical disputes under Alfred “preserved by virtue of their support for episcopal lands” (Pratt 54). In S 1441 and S 1442 record Alfred’s judgments in the presence of his Mercian councilors, Wærferth and a number of other ecclesiastical and secular elites. According to S 1441, the purpose of the witan was to “govern the people in spiritual and temporal matters” and “do justice to men, both clerical and lay, with regard to land and other things in which they have been wronged” (Harmer Select English Historical Documents no. 14). Under the witan, charters transformed from legal instruments drawn up to settle disputes as isolated events to components of an organized legal system presided over by the king where the bishop could pursue a structured agenda that drew on existing charters in his archive.

The body of S 1441 records a vigorous defense by Wærferth of his rights at Woodchester. Wærferth claims that his community was dispossessed of the woodlands at Woodcester by Æthelwold, described in scholarship as a “well-to-do priest” (Pratt 54). The woodlands in question were located at Woodchester, Bisley,
Avening, Gloucs.; and at Scorranstone (? Sherston, Wilts.) and Thornbyrig (? Thornbury, Gloucs.) and swine-pasture at Longridge, Gloucs. The bishop points to a charter that records King Æthelbald’s grant of mastland and woodland at Woodchester to Bishop Wilferð in exchange for perpetual alms on his own account. This charter attempts to drown out competing accounts of an estate. As Sarah Foot argues, “one might look at these texts not as a record but the record...the text would function not as an adjunct to recollection but as its replacement; the charter would tell one account in order that it become the accepted version, countermanding—overwriting—alternatives” (41).

We can see an early example of this process in S 1437, which records a micel sprec (“very noteworthy suit”) regarding a wood-pasture at Sinton resolved in 825 at the Council of Clofesho (Finberg West Midlands No. 246). Reeves in charge of swineherds wished to extend their pasture farther into the wood than “ald gerhyta weron” (“ancient rights allowed”). These “ancient rights” refer to the liability appointed by Æthelbald to the bishop and his community of mast for 300 swine. Because the community at Worcester was drawing on an oral decree of Æthelbald rather than a text, archbishop Wulfred required the bishop and the community to furnish an oath attesting to the veracity of Æthelbald’s decree. According to the charter, the head reeve Hama rode to Worcester to observe the oath but he did not challenge it. Regardless of whether Worcester put forward an accurate rendering of Æthelbald’s decree, this charter made it true. It overwrote the oral account of the estate.
This process was slightly more complicated for an estate that accumulated a documentary history. Charters now must overwrite other texts as well as memory. Wærferth, in S 1441, cites a charter to support his claim. King Æthebald granted the church of St. Peter three hides at Woodchester in 716. This charter from the “old books” is likely Sawyer 103, a Latin charter with bounds. The text makes a strong case that Wærferth was dispossessed and its bounds are used to settle the dispute. Æthelwold withdraws his claim to Woodchester in return for being allowed to enjoy it for his and his son’s life. Securing the eventual return of the estate was consistent with the long-range planning we see from other Worcester bishops. Æthelwold’s geneat Ecglaf and the Worcester priest Wulfhun codify the settlement by riding the bounds recorded in the “old books.” It is likely that the bounds in particular were prepared especially for this meeting. What is revealing here is not that the bounds are falsified but that the diocese felt that they needed to falsify them. It was not sufficient to cite a charter that recorded the see’s claim to Woodchester. Wærferth wanted a precise account of the estate’s boundaries that could be reproduced in a contemporary charter expressed through a ritual performance of walking the bounds.

S 1442 brings us back to Blockley, a monastic estate developed by Bishop Alhhun some years earlier. As discussed in chapter 2, Winchcombe was a large and profitable Mercian royal monastery founded in the eighth century, likely only exceeded in size and importance by Repton. Sims-Williams argues that S 1442

39 For examination of S 1442 in the context of other Anglo-Saxon lawsuits, see Patrick Wormald, “A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits” (no. 22).
shows that a large double-monastery was still in existence in the late-ninth century (*Religion and Literature* 167-8). Wærferth, in the suit, used the *witan* as an opportunity to finally move against the royal monks of Winchecombe, who now found themselves without their major benefactor, a Mercian king. Upton was a profitable estate in Blockley parish that had been controlled by Winchecombe at least since the reign of Cenwulf (796-821). Wærferth presents a policy of Cenwulf as evidence for his claim to Upton (*Whybra* 11). Cenwulf forbade his heirs to grant leases of his hereditary lands for more than one lifetime; therefore, the Mercian kings after Cenwulf who leased Upton had no authority to do so and the estate should have reverted to the see after one lifetime. These records of *witan* under Alfred are unique but even in the absence of other documentary evidence we can see Wærferth’s working within a royal legal system. He was adept at using the charters and royal decrees of the past to meet his immediate needs in a way normally attributed to later Worcester bishops.

**Conclusions**

The precedents in pastoral care and economics established by Bishops Alhhun and Wærferth informed the programs of later Worcester bishops. Their administrations guided the Worcester diocese through the uncertain last years of the Mercian royal house through the dramatic changed ushered in by King Alfred. Ninth-century bishops of Worcester used charters to secure rights and exemptions from a number of royal obligations and established an economy that directed resources towards fortified, increasingly urban markets in London and Worcester.
However, the religious motivations for Alhun and Wærferth are an equally important corollary to their economic initiatives. They were first and foremost the spiritual leaders of their territory, a point that is overshadowed in scholarship that defines monastic life with later definitions. In chapter 4, I examine the economic, archival, and monastic reforms of Bishop Oswald (961-992), a well-documented figure who is credited with replacing Worcester’s clerics with Benedictine monks. Close examination of his charters reveals that Oswald was likely not the zealous reformer that primary sources from the twelfth and fourteenth century purport him to be. Oswald was a cautious administrator who fostered loyalty among a coterie of family members, clerics, and laymen. His greatest innovations are found within his approaches to the estates and archive of the diocese. He transformed the Worcester archive from a loose collection of individual charters into a comprehensive account of the see’s landed wealth. I trace these archival innovations into the eleventh century when Wulfstan II and his monk Hemming compiled and composed the cartularies that preserve the majority of documents that reveal the operations of the bishops of Worcester, so many of them actions that expanded the territory and wealth of the diocese while kings dealt with pressing military crises. The broad view of the history of the diocese compiled by Worcester’s eleventh century monks through their cartularies also shows a religious continuity whereby the financial stability achieved in the ninth and early-tenth centuries facilitated the development of monasticism in late Anglo-Saxon England.
CHAPTER 4

PRACTICAL REALITIES OF MONASTIC REFORM IN THE CHARTERS OF OSWALD

Oswald, bishop of Worcester and York (961-992), features prominently in two types of primary sources. Hagiography remembers him through the life and miracles of a monastic reformer who came to be celebrated as a saint. The chief text, Byrhtferth’s *Vita s. Oswaldii*, highlights eyewitness accounts of Oswald’s miracles and conveys the pious activities of a dedicated monastic reformer. Charters, by contrast, record Oswald’s public acts as an ecclesiastical administrator. In his charters, Oswald appears to be a shrewd ecclesiastical lord with high secular ambitions who controlled massive amounts of land and leased church estates to family, clerics, and laymen to establish a network of loyal elites across Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, and Warwickshire. Charters seemingly darken the image of Oswald as the “unpolluted channel of Divine Grace” he is purported to be in narrative sources (Bullough “St Oswald” 22). However, Oswald’s leases also clarify many of the ambiguities in hagiography that employs a loose, and often problematic, chronology. Charters give a material context to monastic reforms that, in other sources, are presented as intellectual and spiritual events. In order to initiate a change in religious life in a diocese as large and complex as Worcester, Oswald faced a number of logistical and political challenges. The charter evidence shows that he

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1 See Michael Lapidge, *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine*. 105
founded monasteries, managed ecclesiastical and lay personnel within the city of Worcester, and leased rural estates to wealthy thegns who provided military protection for monasteries. Charters reveal Oswald to be a pragmatic bishop and skilled administrator who cultivated an environment where monastic life could flourish, but the most dramatic changes to monastic life in the diocese would come much later.  

I argue that Oswald saw diversified trade and profitable, secure estates as necessary preconditions of sustainable monastic life. He used leases to generate revenue and establish relationships that could fund and protect his monasteries.

In chapter 2, we saw how Worcester’s bishops used charters to secure rights and privileges for their estates. Chapter 3 demonstrated how bishops Alhhun and Wærferth used charters to protect their assets and navigate dramatic political changes during the transition from Mercian to West Saxon rule. Oswald’s leases allow us to push the evidence further because he directly issued the majority of his charters and more survive from his episcopate than for any previous bishop of Worcester. I analyze Oswald’s episcopate and leases in three parts. I begin with an overview of monastic reform in the Worcester diocese and its connection to a larger movement in England and on the continent. Second, I examine Oswald’s leases to clerics, monks, and lay workers living in the city of Worcester to demonstrate that Oswald’s episcopate was dominated by fiscal reforms that fostered a healthy economy where monastic foundations could flourish. Last, I analyze Oswald’s approach to rural estate leases to wealthy laymen in order to demonstrate the ways

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in which he fostered a relationship based on loyalty and rewards, in the process establishing a militarized network of high status thegns across the diocese who could protect trading centers and monasteries.

**Monastic Reformers and Their Texts**

The replacement of secular clerics with Benedictine monks is one of the dominant tenth-century narratives for major sees at Winchester; Christ Church, Canterbury; and Worcester. Primary sources, often written in the twelfth century or later, tell a similar story at each location: pious bishops replaced wanton and lascivious secular clerks in their minster churches with Benedictine monks.

Oswald has long been recognized as the youngest of the three major monastic reformers of the tenth century, the others being Archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury (960-78) and Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester (963-84). Julia Barrow argues that narrative sources on these figures and the proliferation of monastic literature in their archives reveal “a growing intensity of monastic self-consciousness” ("Community" 92). However, the details of the tenth-century monastic reforms of Dunstan, Æthelwold, and Oswald can be difficult to pin down; many accounts are clearly exaggerated or contradictory. Hagiography and monastic literature reveal

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4 In Winchester, sources claim that the clerics were expelled by Æthelwold. Dunstan is said to have established a monastic enclosure at Glastonbury. John of Worcester claimed Oswald expelled clerics who refused to take the monastic habit. See The Life of St. Æthelwold by Wulfstan of Winchester (Ed. Michael Lapidge), Vita S. Dustani (Ed. W. Stubbs), and Florence of Worcester, Chronicon ex Chronicis (Ed B.Thorpe).

5 For an account of Dunstan and Æthelwold's monastic reforms, see D.H. Farmer, “The Progress of the Monastic Revival” (10-19).
attitudes towards monasticism but offer few reliable details on when and how those ideas were put into practice. Monastic reform was a process with many phases and benchmarks in England that was set in motion much earlier than the late tenth century.

King Alfred arguably gave the English Church its first call to action for monastic reform. His preface to Gregory's *Pastoral Care* (c. 890-7) recalled the monastic history of England and lamented its disappearance. In his letter to Bishop Wærferth of Worcester, which prefaces the *Pastoral Care*, Alfred recalled

> how eager the sacred orders were about both teaching and learning, and about all the services that they ought to do for God; and how men from abroad came to this land in search of wisdom and teaching, and how we now must get them from abroad if we shall have them. (Sweet 3)

Alfred intended to use the *Pastoral Care*, or *Hierde-boc* ("Shepherd's Book"), as he called it, to reform the clergy and the laity. Henry Davis argues these efforts were ultimately unsuccessful and that Alfred fared better in reforming education than he did monasteries (11). However, the educational reform occurred within monasteries. In fact, Bishop Wærferth of Worcester translated the *Dialogi* of Gregory the Great and much of Alfred’s cultural renaissance was centered in monastic houses. Davis, like many scholars, employs a narrow definition of monastic reform—the adoption of monastic life in accordance with the *Regula S. Benedicti*.

Copies of the *Regula* were circulating in England even before Alfred. Æthelwold’s English translation of the Rule of Benedict dated to 970, called the Abingdon

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6 Farmer points to Alfred's foundation of monks at Athelney and a nunnery at Shaftesbury as evidence that his desire for monastic reform show he took action on the feelings he expressed in his letter to Wærferth. See "The Progress of the Monastic Revival" (11).
manuscript, was based on a Carolingian copy and an eighth century Worcester manuscript, which is the earliest surviving text of the Rule (Chamberlin 9-11). D.H. Farmer argues the standard view that Alfred’s vision of a monastic revival in England was not realized until 940 by Dunstan at Glastonbury (11). Farmer’s claim obscures an important point about monastic reform. The Rule provided general guidelines to order the lives of monks but had been heavily supplemented by the tenth century and omissions and alterations were common. For example, some versions emphasized private prayer, reading, and meditation while others consumed the monk’s time with communal prayer and psalmody. In addition to asking when the Rule was implemented at a given site, it is important to ask which version of the Rule was in effect. As argued in Chapter 3, there are traces of monastic reform in the charters of bishop Wærferth (873-915). Monastic reform in England was not a single event but a progression.

Æthelwold of Winchester is commonly credited with starting the monastic reform of minster churches in 964 when he replaced the clerics at Abingdon monastery with the support of King Edgar (943-975). The change had precision and finality—clerks “were given the alternative of becoming monks or departing” (Knowles 41). Some narrative sources that concern the Worcester diocese also

7 For more on daily obligations and duties for monks, see Michael Lapidge, The Life of St. Æthelwold (xii).

8 Tinti points to ecclesiastical charters of Wærferth that included prayer schedules, such as S 223. See Sustaining Belief (10).

9 For commentary on Æthelwold’s expulsion of monks, see Barrow, “The Community of Worcester, 961-c.1100.” See also, Lapidge, The Life of St. Æthelwold (lvii-lxii).
depict a sudden change from clerics to monks. Their accounts are contradictory. In his *Chronicon ex Chronicis*, John of Worcester described the sudden conversion of Worcester cathedral in 969. A twelfth-century forged charter of Edgar, S 731, places the conversion at 964, a date chosen to anticipate Winchester’s expulsion of its clerics (Sobecki 9). The most extraordinary example is the fourteenth century chronicle of Ramsey, which places Oswald’s foundation of Winchcombe at 883 and Ramsey at 886 as Benedictine monasteries, giving Oswald a lifespan of over 200 years, a biographical detail that certainly assured his superiority over Æthelwold or Dunstan. The dates for Oswald’s episcopate are the most glaring anachronisms in this section of the chronicle, and are followed by a conventional account of bishops Alhhun and Wærferth with the correct dates. According to H.R. Luard, the goal here appears to be to place the Benedictine conversion of the Worcester diocese at a date that would even rival continental reforms (Luard 368-71). Later narrative sources had good cause to fabricate or embellish Worcester’s conversion to monasticism beyond vanity or bragging rights. Martin Brett argues “their purpose was in part to reassert the continuity of experience across the great caesura of the Conquest, in part also to defend ancient title to lands and rights threatened by grasping or ignorant newcomers” (125). A clear moment of Benedictine ascension strengthened their identity, and a prominent figure like Oswald made the perfect patriarch. For a

10 Oxford, Corpus Christi College 157

11 Barrow accounts for the competition of twelfth-century biographers who placed one reformer in higher esteem over the others to suit the needs of their community. See “The Community of Worcester (84-7).
more reliable account of Worcester’s monastic development we can look to a primary source written no more than a decade after Oswald’s death.

Byrhtferth (c.970-c.1020) was a priest and monk at Ramsey abbey known for his computistic, hagiographic, and historical works. He wrote his Latin Vita s. Oswaldi sometime during the archiepiscopacy of Ælfric of Canterbury (997-1002). Dorothy Whitelock defines the vita as an important source for political history (912). The work is much less prone to exaggeration and inconsistency than the twelfth and fourteenth century works on Oswald. The study and implementation of Benedictine monasticism dominates four of the five sections of the vita, but for the monks at Ramsey, where Byrhtferth was from, Oswald’s monastic reform was a key marker of his sanctity. A long digression into the life of Oswald’s uncle Archbishop Oda (941-58) frames a crucial narrative on Oswald’s formative years. Byrhtferth tells us that Oda gave Oswald his first instruction in “sacred letters” and provided him money to purchase a monastery in Winchester, where he became abbot. Oswald’s failure to influence the way of life in this monastery motivated him to leave England to study monasticism at Fleury (420).

Worcester received its Benedictine influence from Fleury, and it was there that Oswald developed his ideas of monastic life. This house, also known as Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, was long recognized for close links with English monastic reform. Odo of Cluny received papal permission to reform Fleury in 937, although it


13 See also Bullough, “St Oswald: Monk, Bishop, and Archbishop” (4-5).
remained a royal monastery independent from Cluny. John Nightengale argues that much of Fleury’s appeal and auctoritas came from the monks’ possession of St Benedict’s body (23). Archbishop Oda received his monastic habit at Fleury and “considered its monastic life to be the most perfect” (Nightengale 24). Under Oda’s counsel, according to Byrhtferth’s Vita s. Oswaldi, Oswald and some companions went to Fleury to seek a better monastic life and stayed there from 955 to 958 (ii-iii). Oswald returned to England after his uncle Oda died in 958. Byrhtferth says that Dunstan recommended Oswald to King Edgar for his seat at Worcester after he was appointed archbishop of Canterbury (58-9). Edgar was cautious with his episcopal appointments and wanted to ensure loyalty, which led to Oswald also being appointed archbishop of York in 971 (Tinti Sustaining Belief 20).

Oswald likely partnered with agents of the reform movement from Winchester, Canterbury, Fleury, and Ghent. These figures composed Regularis Concordia, a document that aimed to give English monasticism a common set of principles and lay down the basic routines of reformed monastic life, and Fleury’s influence on the text potentially links Oswald to its composition. Based on the Regula S. Benedict, the Concordia also incorporates practices from Fleury and Ghent. The text was composed after a synod at Winchester between 970 and 973 called by King Edgar and presided over by Bishop Æthelwold. At the council, the king “directed a letter of admonition and advice which was received with enthusiastic

14 For more on Odo of Cluny and continental monastic reform, see Uta Blumenthal, The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century (12-5). For an introduction to charters associated with Cluny, see Barbara Rosenwein, To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter (14-20).
approval and acted upon forthwith” (Symons 39). The Regularis Concordia sought to organize a reform movement that was “drifting into incoherence” (Stenton Anglo-Saxon England 452). According to Dom T. Symons, close examination of the Concordia shows that English monasteries are represented as united by faith but not observance, and the text promised a “common bond of union” for what to this point had been isolated local reform efforts by Æthelwold, Dunstan, and Oswald (39-40).

The Concordia is organized into twelve chapters that describe the monks’ daily life throughout the year, the liturgy for important seasons and feasts, the reception of guests, care of sick brethren, and rites accompanying the death and burial of a monk. On the liturgical services, the Concordia reflects continental Benedictine interpretations of the mass, the Divine Office, pontifical ceremonies, chant, and private prayer.

The Concordia contains a wealth of information on proposed daily observances for English Benedictine monks; however, in the absence of surviving office-books or other evidence, it is difficult to assess how these practices were implemented. Michael Lapidge cautions against applying evidence from the substantial number of surviving eleventh-century service-books to tenth-century practices (lxi).

Saints’ lives do little to clarify these matters. For example,

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15 Symons’ 1953 Regularis Concordia : Anglicae Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialiumque remains the most authoritative edition of the Regularis. For commentary on the Regularis, see Tenth Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis Concordia (Ed. David Parsons). See also John Nightengale, “Oswald, Fleury and Continental Reform.”

16 Christopher Dyer offers similar warnings about the dangers of applying tenth- and eleventh-century charter evidence to earlier periods. See “St Oswald and 10,000 West Midland Peasants” (174).
hagiographies on Oswald often employ imprecise chronologies and say little about the specific observances at his monasteries. Close analysis of narrative primary sources relating to the Worcester diocese is thus an exercise in intellectual, rather than material, history. Charters have more to say about the sites of monastic reform and the surrounding countryside, and while they do not dwell on daily religious practices, they reveal more about the makeup of the cathedral community and where Oswald’s monks, clerics, and lay tenants lived, prayed and worked. Oswald’s leases demonstrate the actions of a pragmatic religious leader who used wealth and influence to establish a network of profitable urban and rural estates controlled by clerics and laymen bound to Oswald. I argue that this reorganization of the urban trading zone in the cathedral precincts and rural estates were part of a lease program that provided material support to Oswald’s modest monastic foundations.

The Logistics of Monasticism in the Worcester Diocese

The *Vita s. Oswaldi* outlines elements of monastic reform confirmed by charters. According to Byrhtferth, Oswald founded a monastery at Westbury-on-Trym and set to training monks in the Rule.\(^\text{17}\) He recalled Germanus, a monk and companion at Fleury, to assist him. The monastery had a modest beginning with twelve postulates and a number of children during its first four years (424).\(^\text{18}\) Oswald was concerned about the financial stability of Westbury and sought out King

\(^{17}\) Byrhtferth does not give a date but David Sivier places the foundation of Westbury-on-Trym at 963

\(^{18}\) My citations for Byrthferth’s vita are from *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine* (Ed. Michael Lapidge).
Edgar’s help to give his Benedictine monks more permanent footing. After an Easter meeting attended Æthelwold, Dunstan, Edgar, and a number of other abbots and abbesses, Oswald acquired Ramsey as a site for a monastery and arranged for one of his Westbury monks, Eadnoth, to go there to make preparations. According to Byrhtferth, by 964, Oswald also had established a Benedictine monastery at Winchcombe (434-5). Charter evidence confirms Byrhtferth’s account of the construction of St. Mary’s in Worcester adjacent to St. Peter’s, the bishop’s seat. S 1345 is a grant from 983 to Gardulf, Oswald’s kinsman of an estate at Abbots Lench, Worcestershire. The proem of the charter makes reference to St. Mary’s:

[God] had granted so great a boon of His loving-kindness, that beyond all my expectation I should bring to its completion the basilica which I have founded in my episcopal see, to wit in the monastery of Worcester, in honour of Mary, Mother of God, in the year of our Lord’s Incarnation 983. (Robinson 5)

St. Mary’s marked an important phase in monasticism within the cathedral precinct because it was founded within the city specifically as a Benedictine monastery and because it existed side by side with St. Peter’s, which was still operated by clerics (Tinti Sustaining Belief 32). At this point, we see a key difference in Oswald’s strategy compared with that of his peers at Winchester or Canterbury. Rather than expelling clerics and replacing them with monks, Oswald simply built a new monastery to allow his clerics to continue unhindered in their administrative and pastoral duties. Furthermore, he kept his seat at St. Peter’s. In 991, a year before his death, Oswald leased an estate in Bishops Cleeve to his brother Athelstan “with
consent and license of the monastic society of St. Mary, the episcopal chair of whose monastery is know to be consecrated to St. Peter” (S 1308).\(^{19}\)

Oswald’s charters demonstrate that the burgeoning monastic foundations at Westbury-On-Trym, Ramsey, Winchcombe, and Worcester developed within a network of urban and rural estates. While Oswald does not issue charters with explicit references to monastic reform, his seventy-four leases from 957-996 evidence the bishop’s relationship with key clerical and lay personnel whose labor and support were crucial to monastic initiatives within the diocese. Baker and Holt point to urban renovation around St. Peter’s, the clerical church and seat of the bishop, and St. Mary’s, the adjacent monastery founded by Oswald (140). At this time, Worcester was home to as many as 2000 residents (Dyer and Clarke 31-2). The old cathedral church at St. Peter’s would have been too small for a large urban congregation, and St. Mary’s helped address that, along with the construction of minor churches outside the city center such as All Saints and St. Michaels, which Barrow argues was a cemetery chapel (Baker and Holt "St Oswald" 141; Barrow "Community" 90).\(^{20}\) The growth of the urban market under Oswald necessitated and funded the construction of new churches founded in the spirit of monastic reform. Oswald’s charters demonstrate that he was careful not to disrupt the economy of the diocese in the name of monastic reform. Instead, he solidified his alliances with

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\(^{19}\) S 1308 is incorrectly dated to 965 but H.P.R. Finberg showed the correct date is 991. A list of witnesses identical to other 991 charters points to the later date. See The Early Charters of the West Midlands (no. 138).

\(^{20}\) For archaeological evidence on the locations of St. Peter’s and St. Mary’s in Worcester, see Nigel Baker, The Urban Churches of Worcester—a Survey (115-26).
key clerics with administrative experience and craftsmen working on projects within the city.

Witness lists in Oswald’s charters offer indirect and direct evidence for the makeup of his ecclesiastical *familia*. Scholars have examined these lists to see if there is a discernable change from clerics to monks in the grants. Eric John, P.H. Sawyer, Julia Barrow, and others who have studied Oswald’s role in monastic reform argued whether monks replaced clerics gradually or suddenly in Worcester.21 Proponents of a sudden change, or “big bang,” find their evidence in charters and a number of narrative sources written in the twelfth century or later.22 Eric John argued in 1966 for a sudden change from clerics to monks in the Worcester diocese in 964 based on S 731, a charter issued by King Edgar detailing Oswald’s monastic reforms (234-48). However, since the 1970s most scholars agree that S 731 is a twelfth century forgery.23 Gradualists include Ivor Atkins and P.H. Sawyer; they look to Oswald’s leases for changes in witness lists from figures identified as clerics to those called monks.24 Julia Barrow extended the work of

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22 Proponents of the “big bang” include Eric John and David Farmer. See John, *Orbis Britanniæ and Other Studies* (163-4) and Farmer, “The Progress of the Monastic Revival” (12-13).

23 S 731 has a purported date of 964. David Thornton finds a number of twelfth-century features in S 731 and points to its conspicuous absence from any eleventh-century cartularies. See “Edgar and the Eight Kings, AD 972: textus et dramatis personae.” (56). See also Brooks, “Anglo-Saxon Charters: A Review of Work” (199) and Barrow, “The Community of Worcester” (85-97).

24 Ivor Atkins and Peter Sawyer found no sudden changeover from monks to clerics in the witness lists of Oswald’s leases. See Atkins, “The Church at Worcester from the Eighth to the Twelfth Century” (1-38) and Sawyer, "Charters of the Reform Movement: the Worcester Archive" (84-102).
Sawyer and Atkins on witness lists to analysis of Oswald’s biographies to make a convincing case that the gradual model fits the most reliable evidence. Both approaches assume Worcester had a cleric problem that Oswald aimed to solve with Benedictine monasticism.

Rigorous analysis of charter witness lists found minimal changes in clerical makeup of the community at Worcester. These results contradict narrative sources that describe a massive changing of the guard from clerics to monks. Sawyer identified no sizable change in the ratios of clerics to monks (92). Atkins likewise found no recognizable pattern in the witness lists but remarked on the stability of the community. Some members of the clergy served the diocese for thirty years or more (10). Barrow shows inconsistency within the lists themselves, with some members of the community referenced as monks in leases appearing as clerics in later grants: “In one 977 lease ten out of 27 subscribing members testify as monks, but most of them revert in subsequent leases to describing themselves as priest, deacon, or occasionally clerk ("Community" 87). What should we make of these lists in light of the prevailing narrative of monastic reform? Sawyer concluded that Oswald was a “gentle reformer” and in the absence of a purge argues it is difficult to see “what difference Oswald actually made at Worcester” (93). The reality of Oswald’s charters is difficult to reconcile with the idealized depiction of the reform movement we saw in narrative sources or in evidence from other sees like

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25 See “English Cathedral Communities and Reform in the Late Eleventh and Early Eleventh Centuries.”
Winchester. However, I argue that Oswald’s leases to clerics and laymen demonstrate steps that prepared the diocese for later monastic reforms.

Oswald’s charters reveal a major reorganization of the assets of the diocese. The total hidage value of the leases is approximately 200 hides, which is roughly one-third of Worcester’s total endowment (King 103). The number of charters and land exchanged far exceeds the recorded leases of any previous or subsequent bishop of Worcester. The disproportionate surviving number of charters for Oswald could be due to a number of factors. A number of older charters were likely lost or the eleventh century compilers of Worcester’s cartularies may not have felt the need to copy earlier charters for estates that were well represented in Oswald’s leases.\(^{26}\) However, the number of ecclesiastical charters issued by Oswald mark his episcopate as unique. To this point, most charters were royal diplomas. As we saw in chapters 2 and 3, bishops were able to pursue their interests through royal charters and likely directed their production.\(^{27}\) However, Oswald issued almost all of his surviving charters directly as the lord of his territory with full control over his message.\(^{28}\)

Charters reveal no hostility or dissatisfaction on Oswald’s part towards his clerics. Ten of Oswald’s seventy-four leases were issued directly to members of

\(^{26}\) For more on the lost charters of the Worcester archive, see Keynes, “Anglo-Saxon Charters: Lost and Found” (57-60).

\(^{27}\) On ecclesiastical scriptoria, see Keynes, The Diplomas of King Æthelred ‘The Unready’ (19-28).

\(^{28}\) For more on Oswald’s charters and his authority within the diocese over secular matters, see Steven Bassett, “The Administrative Landscape of the Diocese of Worcester in the Tenth Century” (147-73).
Worcester’s ecclesiastical *familia*, and all had served as clerics in the diocese for a significant amount of time. Several leases pair urban residences within the city walls with profitable rural estates, and five of these grants were made to a single *clericus* named Wulfgar. Barrow identifies him as the longest serving member of the Worcester community during this period, having witnessed every surviving lease from Oswald’s episcopacy but two ("Community" 111). The first of Wulfgar’s leases recorded hints at the reasoning behind Oswald’s clerical leasing program. In 969, Oswald granted Wulfgar a one-hide estate near Worcester at Battenhall located “at the enclosure to the south of the wall near St. Peter’s gate,” along with an urban *haga* within the city walls (S 1327). *Haga* is literally translated as “hedge” but in this context refers to an enclosed urban estate or townhouse, often referred to as a *messuage* in charter scholarship.

*Haga* properties indicate the role clerics played in trade and administration, functions Oswald did not seek to disrupt, it seems. These urban enclosures were common in charters after the fortification of Worcester and some were thought to have been “the means by which the inhabitants of the county were guaranteed accommodation within the defences...in times of trouble” (Barlow and Biddle 383). Urban refuge from a vulnerable rural estate is not likely the scenario here as

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29 They are S 1297, 1302, 1327, 1336, 1339, 1342, 1352, 1369, 1372, and 1374. For commentary on each of the charters and their beneficiaries, see King “St Oswald’s Tenants” (100-17).

30 For more on the predominance of haga properties in charters after the fortification of Worcester, see Baker and Holt, *Urban Growth* (137-8) and Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape* (119:241).

31 *Messuage* is a Middle English term that is likely a misreading of the Old French *mesnage* (OED).
Wulfgar would have been a resident of the city. Della Hooke identifies the role these types of estates played in trade: “Urban property was probably considered rather more of a financial asset, granting local lords access to market facilities, a town house and an additional source of income (Anglo-Saxon Landscape 119). S 1327 gave Wulfgar a significant source of rural revenue and access to the urban marketplace free from all church dues and services. S 1352 is a similar grant to Wulfgar in 985 that includes a rural estate at Clopton in St. John-in-Bedwardine along with rights to an urban haga.

Wulfgar’s other estates included similar freedom from dues and services and were well-placed within existing trade networks. Wulfgar received one hide at Little Whitley in 975 free from all dues and burdens (S 1372). Little Whitley included woodlands and an open field along the curve of a stream. The estate also was adjacent to a major trade route still visible today. The bounds of S 1372 reference the sylweg (“way made with logs”) that Hooke identifies with a route across Monk Wood through Sinton called the gerd wege (“way made with faggots”) that connects with a main valley route towards Worcester (Hooke "Hinterlands" 46). Wulfgar’s largest estate included five hides at Waresley (S 1342) east of his estate at Little Whitley (Whybra 54). The boundary clause of S 1342 references tree stumps that

32 See King, “St Oswald’s Tenants” for more on Wulfgar (111-2).

33 Hooke points out that Witley incorporates OE wiht and leah, hence “wood in the curve of a bend or stream” (Hooke Worcestershire 301).

34 Roads in damp woodland zones were commonly reinforced with logs in Worcestershire (Hooke Anglo-Saxon Landscape 148).
indicate timber cultivation and a *port stræt* (“market road”) to Worcester.\(^{35}\) The bounds also mention *Æhelnoðes croft*. Æthelnoð is another Worcester cleric and his estate at Hindlip is adjacent to Little Whitley (S 1339). Crofts are enclosed fields and Hooke identifies the frequent association of crofts with personal names as an indication that estates included fields not under common use by village communities (Hooke *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 241). Individually, the estates were small but likely profitable. When viewed collectively, these documents suggest that Wulfgar generated significant wealth from his estates, all of which were rich in woodland resources and likely arable land with adjacent roadways to move commodities to Worcester. In the city, he had access to the urban market, and almost all of his estates were free of dues and burdens.

Other clerical beneficiaries in Oswald’s grants did not do as well as Wulfgar but likely profited handsomely nonetheless. Oswald leased an estate at Bredicot, along with seven acres of meadow and a *haga*, to the priest Goding in 987 in exchange for his work as a scribe at Worcester (S 1369).\(^{36}\) Goding was an active figure in Oswald’s administration, appearing as a witness in forty-four charters.\(^{37}\) Goding’s rights over the estate include *allum pingum pe parto belimað* (“all things that belong to it”). Because of his labor as a scribe, there are no rents or duties

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\(^{35}\) For an account of market roads leading to Worcester, see Hooke “Hinterlands and Routeways” (43-52).

\(^{36}\) Goding’s work as a scribe is recorded in *Hemming’s Cartulary*. Hemming’s own notes indicate that Goding wrote many books for the monastery, although none survive (Hearne I. 265).

\(^{37}\) Sawyer catalogues all charter witness-list references to Goding and a number of other clerics in Oswald’s community. See “Charters of the Reform Movement” (90-1).
associated with the estate apart from bridge repair, fortifications, and military service, the so-called *trinoda necessitas*. However, despite his serving as a witness in many charters, there is no evidence for Goding’s personal imprint on land management. He was likely not a tenant who sought to revitalize or expand his estate’s productivity by cultivating new ground or altering trade relationships. Rather, Goding continued existing processes. The boundary clause of the charter strongly indicates its resources.

These are the boundaries of the three hides at Bredicot, namely first from the bare hill in front of the old dyke, along the old dyke to the famous site, from the famous site back to the dyke, along the dyke as far as the saltway, then west over the saltway to the hedged enclosure at the Spetchley boundary, from the Spetchley boundary along the slope to the west of the oxen’s pasture, from the oxen’s pasture north to the hedged enclosure... (Robertson 127)

Agriculture was not a major activity at this site. A century after the charter, in 1086, the Domesday Book (DB) recorded only one plough team, two smallholders, and two slaves at Bredicot. A forest comprised two-thirds of this three-hide estate. These values are likely unchanged from the when Goding controlled the estate. Bredicot is one of many estates in this corner of Worcestershire with recorded *leah* features. The *oxnaleage* ("oxen wood" or "clearing") projects westwards beyond a *saltstraet*. The terrain in this section of the estate was rough and the western and southern portions of Bredicot rose to elevations of over 200 feet above the estate

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38 For commentary on site activity and a map of the estate, see Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape* (238–9) and *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds* (311–14). See also Whybra, *A Lost English County* (54).

39 Hooke argues for continuity in agricultural yields for the estate based on evidence for surrounding estates. See *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* (163).
(Hooke *Worcestershire* 311-14). However, the estate's woodland resources and proximity to a major salt road are what give it value.\(^{40}\) As we saw in chapter 2, wooded estates in close proximity to salt roads were valuable because those wishing to engage in the salt trade would often buy their wood in Worcestershire to trade for salt.

Oswald's most peculiar ecclesiastical lease is S 1336, a grant of three hides at Little Washbourne to a monk named Wynsinge. He is the only beneficiary in any Worcester charter who is explicitly called a monk, a classification that should bar him from owning personal property. According to Byrhtferth's *Vita s. Oswaldii*, Wynsinge was sent to Ramsey by Oswald to learn the Benedictine Rule, and he returned with several brothers from the Ramsey choir (Byrhtferth 435). Sawyer calls the charter an “extraordinary arrangement” for a true monk to receive an estate in the midst of a major monastic reformation (92). Eric John posits that the estate may have been intended for a wife and children who Wynsinge abandoned when became a monk; furthermore, "had it been a flagrant breach of the Rule one feels it would have been a larger grant" (*Orbis* 245-6). However, as we have seen, all of Oswald's clerical grants are between one and five hides and although the estates are small, their resources and proximity to major roadways indicate that they were profitable. Wynsinge's charter more likely speaks to the nature of the monastic reform at Worcester. As Sawyer points out, Wynsinge is referenced as cleric even

\(^{40}\) Hooke provides the most comprehensive account of the salt trade in the Worcester diocese. See "The Droitwich Salt Industry" (123-69).
after his conversion to monasticism at Ramsey (92). Wynsinge's title was not as significant as the tasks he performed for the diocese and Oswald apparently valued his skills as an administrator.

Oswald's clerical leases demonstrate his practical side. They seem to have promoted a character change in the Worcester diocese from the existing clerical culture but promoted monasticism within the context of the existing economic structure. The bishop showed no desire to purge the diocese of his clerics or bring in monks from outside to replace them. They served administrative functions in Worcester and it seems Oswald wanted to retain them. Oswald similarly rewarded skilled workers within the city walls to guarantee loyalty and future work. In S 1344, Oswald granted Wulfhelm, his faithful artifex (craftsman) a one-hide estate at an unspecified location. Finberg argued the charter refers to an estate at Compton in Withington, Gloucestershire (*West Midlands* no. 129). S 1365 references a grant to another artifex named Æthelmær in 991 of two hides at Æsctun (probably Ashton-under-Hill, Worcestershire) (*West Midlands* no. 330). These rural grants do not indicate Oswald's intention of releasing these men from his service. Rather, he was making provision for their continued residence in Worcester by providing them with a means to support themselves through income from their estates. Baker and Holt argue that these craftsmen likely worked with jewels and precious metals (*"St Oswald"* 137-8). Given construction projects and refurbishments at sites like St.

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41 See also King, "St Oswald’s Tenants" (112-3).

42 On the location of the estate, see Whybra, *A Lost English County* (18). See also Baker and Holt, *Urban Growth* (137-8).
Mary’s, it is unthinkable that Oswald would give experienced skilled craftsmen rural estates with the intention that they would live in them.

Tenant obligations on small rural estates, which amounted to little more than strips of farmland in some cases, varied but tended to involve light service or taxation. The absence of references to houses or structures might indicate that these estates were investment properties. In 963, Oswald granted a small, one-hide estate at Cotheridge to his thegn Ælfric (S 1303). The land use depicted in S 1303 defines this space as a small-scale agricultural zone. The food rent was the grain from two acres of land payable yearly. In exchange, Oswald granted him “every year twelve fathers of wood without payment.” In a 990 charter, Bishop Oswald granted two hides at Moreton near Bredon to his servants Beornheah and Brihtstan “in return for four pounds sterling money” (S 1363). The beneficiaries are brothers and the charter stipulates that “the elder shall have three acres and the younger the fourth, both central and outlying, as pertains to the estate” (Robertson no. 63; "The Electronic Sawyer"). Hooke identifies the phrase “central and outlying” (ge inner ge utter) in several other charters for estates in Warwickshire and in each case land seems to be divided into one-acre strips assigned to different holders (Anglo-Saxon Landscape 196). These assigned strips of land and the enclosed fields called crofts replaced the common land (communi ure) found in earlier charters. Intermixed acre-strips led to a greater degree of specialization and interdependence than found on self-sufficient large manors. Christopher Dyer argues a small, specialized estate

43 See Hooke, The Anglo-Saxon Landscape (Anglo-Saxon Landscape 196-7).
would be drawn into exchange and marketing “as the tenant of a woodland property with surplus pigs or timber traded these for corn, and the tenant of arable land in the Avon valley took his corn to market” ("St Oswald" 182). These were likely investment properties worked by low-status peasants, as it is unlikely that Oswald would have his personal servants live twenty miles from Worcester. City land, haga properties, would have housed Oswald’s lay and clerical retainers.

Oswald’s charters indicate that his rural leases included property with well-established patterns of land use located in close proximity to fortifications that could offer protection. At Smite in Hindlip, Oswald leased a portion of an estate to his minister Æthelnoth that included the ympan leah, the “woodland of the young saplings” (S 1339). Hooke identifies the Old English impa (sapling) with deliberate regeneration of woodlands (Anglo-Saxon Landscape 155). Woods in this area were systematically cleared and allowed to regrow.44 Smite also borders the porn leah (“wood grown with thorns”) that is included in a boundary clause of Martin Hussingtree (S 786). Both Smite and Martin Hussingtree have ready access to the same saltway we find at Bredicot. That same road also appears in S 1600, a set of bounds for Lower Wolverton in Stoulton, Worcestershire along with a reference to a sealtpytte (salt pit).45 The boundary clause of S 1369 also includes a byrig

44 According to Christopher Grocock, coppiced woodlands took approximately seven years to regenerate (Grocock 30).

45 These bounds are not attached to a charter. The rationale for preserving bounds apart from a charter are not known, but it seems likely these bounds were originally preserved in the archive on separate slips of parchment before being copied into the cartulary, indicating that their association with a grant had been lost some time before the cartulary was commissioned (Finberg West Midlands no. 380).
(“fortification”) that Hooke identifies as “a strategic position for a defended enclosure in relation to the surrounding countryside” (Hooke *Worcestershire* 303).

The fact that Smite runs up against a *byrig* is significant because it provides evidence of defense for Oswald’s rural estates. All of the estates mentioned above are clustered together north of Worcester (Whybra 54). As a provision of bookland, the beneficiaries of the estates would have been required to provide military service (Bullough "St Oswald" 19). Charters recording grants to high-status tenants show that thegns likely organized Oswald’s rural defenses. Oswald leased large estates and groups of estates in the hinterland to thegns within kinship groups who could protect the assets and monasteries within the diocese.

**Expanding the Militarized Lay Familia**

Oswald’s leases offer evidence for the use of landed wealth as a mechanism for coalition building amongst laymen well-equipped to meet the military needs of the diocese. Oswald provisioned for the economic security of his monasteries and to protect those assets he strategically placed rural estates under the control of wealthy laymen who defended his assets in exchange for a share of profit. The largest category of lessee during Bishop Oswald’s administration is the lay tenant. Lay tenants account for “just under three-quarters of the total hidage known to have been leased out by the church” (King 103). Some of these were small estates leased to a single servant or craftsman as discussed above. However, most rural estates in Warwickshire and Gloucestershire tended to be concentrated within kinship groups and were strategically positioned around vulnerable monastic sites in need of
protection, and charters gave Oswald the means to compel thegns into providing military support. Bullough argues Oswald created a “network, an intermeshing, of high-status individuals through three counties, with its central knot in Worcester and the domus of the bishop ("St Oswald" 12). In most cases, there is charter evidence that the tenants are personally attached to the bishop in some way and were bound to him as thegns. Oswald incorporated this extensive network of secular elites into his ecclesiastical community to provide stimulus to Worcester’s burgeoning economy and perhaps more importantly military security for church assets.46

The inclusion of laymen in the ecclesiastical familia is significant because it gave Oswald access to a military force and likely severed ties of some of these thegns to local ealdorman and brought them into Oswald’s service. S 1363, also called the Indiculum, is a letter by Oswald to King Edgar dated to 964 that outlines the conditions on which the bishop grants leases.47 Oswald states that he allows laymen to hold church lands under a number of conditions; namely, that they fulfill “every regulation of service as horsemen that pertains to horsemen, and that they shall pay in full everything that justly belongs to the jurisdiction of the church itself.” Furthermore, these thegns are “subject with all humility and subjection to the

46 King identifies military implications in the concentration of leases amongst kinship groups. See “St Oswald's Tenants” (106-7). See also, Armitage Robinson, "St. Oswald and the Church of Worcester" (25-33).

47 There is some disagreement about the authenticity of the charter. Stenton and Finberg treat it as authentic (Anglo-Saxon England 485-6; West Midlands no. 289). Vanessa King argues that it is not contemporary (114-6). In my own reading the charter is genuine or has genuine elements, particularly in the terms governing the relationship of the bishop to his lay tenants.
lordship and will of the *archiductor* who presides over the bishopric” (A. Jones 123).⁴⁸ A.E.E. Jones translates *archiductor* as “supreme controller,” and Bullough points out that it is unique in a genuine pre-1066 text (123; "St Oswald" 12). The implication is clear. Oswald consolidated ecclesiastical and lay authority through his charters with the approval of the king, a move that, in effect, allowed Oswald to form his own army. Edgar did not rule the city of Worcester by proxy through an ealdorman as Alfred had done.⁴⁹ Edgar placed the power to rule, collect taxes, and raise an army with the bishop.

While there is some emphasis on the payment of dues and tolls to the church, S 1363 is dominated by the discussion of horsemen under the bishop’s command. Oswald’s charters say little directly about the services exacted from his estates, which led Eric John to surmise that the leases “were dispensations to favoured tenants from the more stringent conditions imposed by the *Indiculum*” (*Land Tenure* 131). However, this does not seem likely, since the grants to clerics specified when they were free from dues and services. It is more likely, as Stenton argued, that the service expectations Oswald’s lay grants were implicit rather than explicit (*English Feudalism* 121). Furthermore, as King points out, if we were to accept John’s position that Oswald’s charters only exacted services stated directly, “we would have to accept not just the fact that nearly half the land leased was free of all obligations but that approximately two-thirds did not require performance of the

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⁴⁸ For a translation of S 1363 see A.E.E. Jones, *Anglo-Saxon Worcester*.

⁴⁹ For the powers of ealdormen in Worcester under King Alfred (849-99), see Walker, *Mercia* (69-94).
three common dues” (115). The power granted to Oswald in S 1363 indicates that he had lordship over the thgns who, as F.W. Maitland put it, “rode under the banner of St. Mary of Worcester” (380).

A number of Oswald’s leases to the thgns granted estates that were clustered around strategic defensive positions adjacent to monastic sites. Oswald likely reformed Winchcombe in Gloucestershire as a Benedictine monastery around 966 (Lapidge St Oswald 101). Tinti posits that religious life at Winchcombe may have been on the decline after the end of Mercian rule in the 870s; Mercian kings had founded the minster and had been its principal patrons (Sustaining Belief 249). Oswald refounded St. Kenelm’s minster at Winchcombe under the supervision of Abbot Germanus in 970 (D.N. Dumville 54). As one of Oswald’s earliest Benedictine foundations, Winchcombe would have trained monks to serve in other monasteries in the diocese, including Wydings whom Oswald placed in charge of his monastery at Worcester (Barrow “Community” 95). Oswald’s leases reveal his plans to arrange for the protection of the monastery before its foundation. There are seven Gloucestershire leases issued by Oswald totaling fourteen hides, and King suggests they were likely held by one kinship group (106). The estates all lie in southern Gloucestershire east of the Severn river along the Wiltshire border (Whybra 46-7). In 967, Oswald leased two hides at Itchington to his minister Wulfgar (S 1316). In 969, Oswald leased a two-hide portion of the Stoke Bishop estate to Wulfgar’s brother Æthelweard (S 1317) and added an additional three hides to the grant in

50 The charters are S 1346, 1317, 1357 1312, 1316, 1362, 1299.
Concentrating leases in the area amongst a single kinship group with close ties to his administration in Worcester offered Oswald a ready, structured military force to protect the monastery.

Oswald’s minster at Stratford may have needed similar protection.

The thegn Eadric is the most prominent lay tenant in Oswald’s leases. He held seventeen and a half hides acquired through five leases issued between 966 and 991. Eadric had close ties to the bishop. In S 1310, Eadric is called compatri to Oswald, translated as “sponsor” by Robertson (88-9). In this instance the term likely refers to the relationship between godparents of the same child or that between a godparent and parent. S 1310 packaged land together in three places near Stratford minster at Alveston, Upper Stratford, and Fachanleah. In 966, Oswald references his grant to Eadric as a single estate, a quondam rusculi partem (“a certain piece of land”), despite the land being dispersed across several locations: one and a half acres are at Alveston, every other acre of open land at Upper Stratford and Fachanleah and other acreage in the area bounded by roads and earthworks, including three acres north of the Avon river. Dyer argues that this grant “has the air of a new arrangement” ("Dispersed Settlements" 177 n.13). Consequently, the estate was drawn up specifically for Eadric, and grants within his kinship group filled in some of the gaps between his holdings, demonstrating that his family controlled lay properties across this entire area around the minster of Stratford. In S 1318, Oswald granted Æthelweard, his fidelis, seven hides at Tiddington near Alveston. The

51 See S 1310, 1334, 1350, 1358, and 1366. For an account of the beneficiaries of these charters, see King, “St Oswald’s Tenants” (107-10).
inheritance of estates by shared relatives indicates that Eadric and Æthelweard were brothers (King 106). Furthermore, Eadric and Æthelweard’s holdings in Warwickshire are clustered in the southern part of the county on both sides of the River Avon (Whybra 50). The strong defensive position of these estates and the concentration of strategic sites in the hands of wealthy thegns with familial ties strongly suggest that Oswald had an eye on defense in these leases.

Defense was a practical concern of the monastic revival in Worcester, and Oswald’s efforts at spiritual reform required this form of material support. In many ways, the military branch of Oswald’s familia is a continuation of the fortification of the Worcester diocese begun by King Alfred in the late ninth century. Under King Edgar, Oswald consolidated power to an extent that had not been seen under a bishop of Worcester since the foundation of the diocese in the seventh century. Oswald’s reorganization of the church of Worcester’s estates and monasteries took place between the years 969-975, and these years corresponded to the peak of his authority. After Edgar’s death in 975, Elphere, the Duke of Mercia, was installed by King Edward (975-8). According to Florence of Worcester, Elphere deprived monks in the Worcester diocese of many of their privileges and replaced them with secular clerics and Danish invasions again became a problem in the diocese as their defenses weakened (A. Jones 112). Oswald died in 992, but many of the core

52 For Alfred’s role in the fortification of Worcester, see David Pratt, The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great (105-6).

53 For an account of the power of bishops of Worcester in the seventh and early eighth century, see A.E.E. Jones, Anglo-Saxon Worcester (45-8).
principles of his episcopate would carry over into the eleventh century. While the
diocese would never again see the autonomy Oswald achieved, his rigorous account
of church assets found expression in the composition of Worcester's cartularies in
the eleventh century. The seeds of Benedictine reform he planted survived as well.
The monasteries at St. Mary’s, Ramsey, Winchecombe, and elsewhere flourished as
monastic places under the care of Bishop Wulfstan (1002-1016) and his
successors.54

**From the Cathedral to the Furrow**

Oswald’s leases reveal him to be a bishop with an intense focus on the
economic and military concerns of his diocese. This being the case, how do we
reconcile his seemingly secular economic and military initiatives with the image of
monastic reform the narrative sources express? In one respect, hagiography and
charters reveal two Oswalds: the saint and the shrewd ecclesiastical lord. However,
for Anglo-Saxon bishops, as Sarah Foot puts it, landed wealth was how a religious
house could “fight the world with the world’s weapons” (47). To build a strong,
independent church, these leases were also “the means by which he secured for the
church of Worcester the possibility of an effective exercise of its spiritual
responsibilities” (Bullough 13). Byrhtferth describes a service at St. Mary’s that
encapsulates the meaning of *familia* under Oswald: “When all the bishops and
ealdormen and abbots and thegns had entered the church, there was an immense
multitude of people there, all of whom, surveying the splendor of God’s church,

54 Tinti comments on the impact of Oswald's archival innovations and monastic reforms. See *Sustaining Belief* (25-74).
declared the glory of God on high in joyful mind and sincere spirit” (Lapidge Oswald 117). This highly stylized depiction brings together laymen of all levels from ealdormen and thegns to the general populace at St. Mary’s, the urban symbol of Oswald’s monastic reform. In his charters, we see similarities. Oswald sought a harmonious partnership between his clerics, monks, and laymen that could develop and sustain his religious houses through a strong economy protected by his thegns. There is no question that elements of the Oswald we see in hagiography are fabrications of later Benedictine monks anxious to justify their place in the diocese in the changing political climate up to and after the Conquest. However, in similar ways to forged charters that have a genuine core, hagiographical sources reveal genuine efforts by Oswald to develop monastic life within the diocese. Far from discounting or negating these initiatives, charters, in many ways, confirm them. The management of ecclesiastical personnel and leases to prominent laymen recorded in charters are the practical contexts for Oswald’s pastoral care. Oswald developed the administrative and fiscal structure needed to sustain a monastic revival through a keen understanding of political reality.

Chapter 4 has addressed how Oswald initiated and responded to political and economic change within the context of his spiritual responsibilities. This is history as seen from above, which is to say that charters and narrative sources reveal the plans and outcomes of negotiations between high status ecclesiastical and secular elites on estate transfers and trade agreements. However, none of these initiatives and developments would have been possible without a massive peasant labor force
to work the land and attend to day-to-day tasks that drove the economy. Chapter 5 offers a history from below that explores peasant work and navigates much of the chronology we have explored thus far from the foundation of the diocese through Bishop Oswald’s episcopate. Those who enjoyed elite status took a wide view of their territory as they pursued their agendas through charters. The peasant world was smaller and more local. In chapter 5, I turn my attention to what charters can tell us about the lives of the multitude. I analyze documentary and archaeological evidence for a number of urban and rural sites to reconstruct how peasants attached to places (estates) lived and worked in spaces (linked estates and regional markets).
CHAPTER 5

TRACES OF PEASANT LABOR IN WORCESTER ARCHIVE CHARTERS

Bishop Oswald (961-92) was arguably the most influential bishop in the history of the Worcester diocese. In Chapter 4, I assessed how Oswald streamlined the management of the church’s endowment and developed an economy that could support his ecclesiastical community and its lay allies. Oswald’s charters are the clearest example of how these documents record and direct land use at the estate level. These texts allow us to examine what Oswald’s lease program sought to achieve. The named parties in charters from the seventh through the ninth centuries are typically bishops, kings, and lay persons of high status who controlled large estates. With their stylized openings, charters present themselves as God’s wisdom, given verbal form and spoken through the kings and bishops who issued the documents. But religious communities and ordinary lay people had a clear stake in these transactions as well. Charters directly address populations otherwise hard to study, including layfolk of modest means, craft workers, and servants. Peasants, those who worked small holdings of land or performed specialized labor, such as swineherding or beekeeping, generally are assumed to occupy the periphery of this world. However, we will see that although they are not mentioned as individuals, members of this workforce figures prominently in charters that managed both their habitation and their occupations.
Minster churches that were established and maintained in charters needed peasant communities to support them and the dozens of estates associated with these churches. Charters of the Worcester archive encourage us to view the endowment as a collection of assets that conveys stability, power, and wealth. I will attempt to show that although peasants did not witness charters or have a voice in their terms, the documents of the Worcester archive nonetheless bear traces of laborers’ lives. The wealth of the diocese was sustained through the labor of peasants who farmed, tended to animals, cut timber, and worked in all manner of specialized industries from leatherworking to bee-keeping. Changes in land management, among them the development of open field agriculture, which increased efficiency and generated surplus product, had direct consequences for peasant life. These developments helped some peasants profit from their labor by granting them opportunities to sell surplus product through a system of rural marketing.

The terms of charters covered countless farms in their accounts of large blocks of land that comprised ecclesiastical estates, obscuring our view of the people who lived in these places. With this complication in mind, I examine three aspects of peasant life from the seventh through the tenth century as they are recorded in charters. First, I explore the relationship between settlement patterns and agriculture in the Worcester diocese. Then I describe the communal approaches to farming within systems of open fields that characterized land use in the Worcester diocese. Next I show how detached woodland properties were organized to meet the
material and pasturing needs of large agricultural estates. I close the chapter with a discussion of travel and trade.

**Early Settlement Morphology in the Worcester Diocese**

In the decades after 680 the bishops of Worcester took control of dozens of profitable agricultural and woodland estates, many of them donations made by the king. Charters record the changes in the landscape that ensued. Settlement and land use changed from dispersed settlements, farmed by peasants who worked small, irregular fields, to a series of complex holdings known as “multiple estates.” These large holdings were characterized by a minster church, manor house with administrative functions, and surrounding subsidiary peasant settlements.¹

Charters and material evidence show that settlements formed around multiple estates in a process called settlement nucleation.² Rights associated with bulk land gave the Worcester diocese power to restructure their holdings. Charter evidence shows that peasant settlements coalesced around minster churches that would then direct site activity through reeves. Where did these peasants come from and how can we tell if they lived in nucleated settlements? Charters typically represent the first documentary reference to an estate or piece of land; material evidence of rural settlements is sparse for many estates. However, charters that brought estates into Worcester’s endowment use language that locates peasants and their settlements. A

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¹ The concept of multiple estates were first proposed by Glanville Jones in 1961. See “Settlement Patterns in Anglo-Saxon England” and “Multiple Estates and Early Settlement.” See also Stephen Rippon’s 2002, *Beyond the Medieval Village*.

² Settlement nucleation is a process that entailed the abandonment of small, scattered villages in favor of concentrated settlements (Dyer "Dispersed Settlements" 98).
number of charters use land units that indicate existing communities of taxable residents. The layout of those communities is signaled by elements of their place-names. Habitative place-names that incorporate -ham, -tun, and -burh, provide our clearest evidence that the Worcester diocese deliberately manipulated where their labor force lived.³

The Worcester diocese held its estates by landboc (charter) and consequently had the power to compel existing peasant communities to leave isolated settlements and relocate around minster churches. These churches, in turn, had administrative responsibilities over surrounding peasant settlements. As we saw in the first four chapters, bookland had many benefits for the church. Charters offered bishops relief from taxation and burdens of hospitality and the freedom to transfer, bequeath, or divide their estates as they saw fit. Worcester’s bishops enjoyed great flexibility with their assets. Furthermore, the secular food renders and consuetudines ("customary") dues that would have been owed to the king were directed instead to the diocese.⁴ The largest benefit to bookland from an administrative point of view was the capacity it afforded bishops to supersede any rights to land held by peasants or laymen of higher status. A royal donation of a block of land seemingly gave the diocese the right to develop this land as the bishops wished. If there were existing peasant communities there, they could be relocated regardless of any

³ For entries on Ham (homestead), tun (farmstead), and burh (stronghold), See A.D. Mills, Dictionary of English Place-Names. See also, Margaret Gelling, “The Place Name Volumes for Worcestershire and Warwickshire: a New Look” (60-66).

⁴ For more on bookland, see Ann Williams, “Land Tenure.” On the customary dues paid to bishops, see Sims-Williams, Religion and Literature (139).
traditional claims peasants had to their land. Bishops and their agents had the authority to reorganize existing tenements and fields on their estates. But is there evidence that this occurred?

Finding direct evidence of settlements in the periods before they are recorded in charters is difficult. Charters brought many estates in the Worcester diocese into documentary history for the first time and most of the archeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon peasant settlements dates from the tenth century. However, there are logical reasons to assume continuous occupation between Roman and Anglo-Saxon times. Dyer writes, “The end of Roman administration would not necessarily have led to the abandonment of good land and useful resources” (Lords and Peasants 20). Charters can support Dyer’s postulation to some degree. H.P.R. Finberg used topographical evidence of estate boundaries at Blockley and Withington to suggest that Romano-British villa estates were taken over by Anglo-Saxons. Finberg’s method can be applied to areas where settlement continuity involved large Roman estates, high-status sites. We can locate smaller, ordinary settlements in the units charters use to measure land.

5 See Ann Williams, “A Bell-house and a Burh-geat.” Williams argues kings’ thegns reorganized settlements and fields around their manor-houses (233). A similar process was likely at work on ecclesiastical estates, which likewise needed laborers to work the land.

6 Archaeological evidence has shown some early peasant settlements in Anglo-Saxon England. In Northamptonshire, for example, evidence of dispersed settlements was found beneath strip fields that continued to be ploughed throughout the medieval period (Hall 22-38). Such evidence in Worcestershire has proven elusive, largely due to a lack of rural excavations. For tenth century evidence, see Hooke, “Archaeological Agenda” (149-72).

7 For an overview of major Roman settlements in the West Midlands, see P.A. Barker, “The Roman Town” (15-19).

8 See Finberg, “Roman and Saxon Withington” (1-16).
The earliest Worcester charters employ vocabulary that suggests an existing peasant population at the time the diocese acquired its estates. The church of Worcester acquired most, if not all, of their seventeen major revenue-producing estates through royal donations between 680 and 711. The charters that brought these estates under control of the bishop used terms that suggest the existence of communities of taxable peasant workers. Estates that comprised the church’s original endowment are calculated in numbers of hides of between five and sixty. The relevant terms are cassatae, cassata, manentes, mansae, mansions, or tributary, terms used to render hide (hid in Old English) in Anglo-Saxon charters. These terms are also found in continental charters in reference to the lands of dependent tenants. Dyer points out the divisions that described the bishops’ estates are indicative of fiscal assessments based on households and family holdings “productive enough to yield some form of tax by the time they first appeared in Worcester charters” (Lords and Peasants 21). If these lands were being taxed, they were being worked and much of that labor would have come from peasants. But

9 Before the tenth century, it is accurate to refer to estates in the Worcester diocese as belonging to the church of Worcester. The earliest the cathedral monastery that could be said to have its own endowment was the episcopate of Oswald (972-992). See Dyer, Lords and Peasants (9). The Worcester church’s major estates at its foundation were Hartlebury, Alvechurch, Hanbury, Hamptom, Northwick, Stratford, Wick, Kempsey, Fladbury, Treddington, Ripple, Bredon, Blockley, Cleeve, Withington, Bidbury, and Westbury.

10 A hide is the amount of land sufficient to support one household and its size varied according to the resources of the land in the early Anglo-Saxon period but was set at approximately 120 acres by the eleventh century. For the changing values of hides, see Martin J. Ryan, “That ‘Dreary Old Question’: the Hide in Early Anglo-Saxon England.”

11 See Chris Wickham, “Problems of Comparing Rural Society in Early Medieval Western Europe” (235).

12 S 52 includes thirty hides at Ripple and S 77 includes 30 hides at Hanbury and Aust.
how can we detect settlement nucelation on these estates? The use of habitative place-names provides evidence for nucleation.

The use of the habitative elements in place-names such as *ham* ("homestead") or *tun* ("farmstead") indicates deliberate manipulation of settlement patterns. Habitative place- and settlement-names replaced earlier naming conventions based on topography. Within habitative naming conventions, there are finer distinctions as well. *Ham* elements appear earliest in the seventh century and typically denote a single dwelling or land on the side of a river. Evesham Abbey was founded by Egwin (693-717), the third bishop of Worcester in 701. The name is derived from *Eof*, the name of a swineherd in Egwin's service, and *ham* ("homestead"). S 1251 records the transfer of a number of estates in 714 to form an endowment for Evesham including Stratford-upon-Avon, Chadbury, and eighty-four unnamed hides around the abbey. Agricultural development in this area is shown by alluviation in river valleys arising from soil erosion consistent with newly cultivated land (Brown and Foard 81). We can surmise given the scale of the farming here (over 100 hides) that peasants who worked here lived nearby in nucleated settlements.

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13 Margaret Gelling describes topographical settlement-names as the dominant convention “in the earliest period of English speech” ("The Place-Name Volumes for Worcestershire and Warwickshire: A New Look" 67). Early site names in the diocese, like Fulbrook, Salford, and Stratford lack references to buildings and villages. Gelling’s distinction between early topographical settlement-names and later habitative ones, like Fladbury, is supported by archaeological finds. See D.C. Cox, “The Vale Estates of the Church of Evesham c. 700-1086 (40-1).


15 For an account of Eof, see G.C. Alston, “Evesham Abbey.”
Tun ("farmstead") appears frequently only after the mid-eighth century. Hooke argues that the use of -tun elements in later settlement-names is definitive evidence of nucleation ("Village Development" 134). Tun settlements are typically associated with named individuals and appear most frequently starting in the mid-eighth century, a period, Hooke argues, of intense settlement nucleation. For example, a grant in 757 by Bishop Mildred (743-75) of Worcester of thirty hides at Treddington was “previously held by Tyrdda” (S 55). Small townships that clustered around Treddington appear in tenth-century charters, including Longdon (S 1321), Blackwell (S 1337), and Talton (S 1366). Della Hooke points to trackways leading from these smaller settlements around Treddington that reveal a network of nucleated settlements within large open fields of arable land (Hooke Warwickshire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds 38-41).

The model of settlement and land use at Treddington is consistent with Hodges’ theories on tiered market systems; according to Hodges, field systems and settlement patterns are directed from above through “administrative foci” oriented towards the market (Dark Age Economics 177). Hodges argues that trade drove settlement nucleation. An earlier economy built on exchange was replaced by one based on trade that “depends on networks built up from other networks” (15-6).

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17 On the association of Tyrdda with the estate, see Gelling, Signposts of the Past (178).

18 For more on these and other estates around Treddington, see Hooke, Warwickshire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds (40).

19 See also Frantzen, Food, Eating, and Identity (52-3).
Allen J. Frantzen points out that, in Hodges’ view, “These markets are thought to have developed from the top down, not the bottom up” (*Food, Eating and Identity* 53). This model fits the landscape at Treddington. At Treddington, the church functions as the *caput* in the multiple estate theory. *Caput* literally means head and is used as a metonymy in Jones’ theory for the central estate in a network (Hodges 15). The theory states that an administrative center directed settlement, crop selection, and field systems for a network of smaller villages. Hodges adds a layer on top of this—the regional market, in this case the church of Worcester, presided over an administrative hub that managed land use at surrounding smaller estates to direct rent and surplus product to the central market.

Effective direction of peasant labor in nucleated settlements required an administrative focal point, and there is reason to believe that the Worcester diocese used minster churches, some of which were founded early in the charters of the diocese, to serve that function. A prominent example is found in S 76, a grant in 697 by King Æthelred (675-704) to Oftfor, bishop of Worcester, of forty-four hides at Fladbury. The estate was donated “just as it was first given” so that “the most proper life of monks on it under the rule of an abbot may be recovered.” Hooke takes the – *bur* element of Fladbury, which typically denotes a fortification, to refer to the minster church established at the site in the mid-seventh century (*Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 38). Fladbury means “Flæd’s stronghold” and probably refers to Æflæda, Æthelred’s sister-in-law, an abbess at the northern monastery of Streoneshalh.

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20 See Hodges, *Dark Age Economics* (53). See also Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome* for a similar argument on markets in Gaul, Lombard, and Byzantine Italy (219-20).
655, who likely owned the Fladbury, at least initially (Hooke *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 11). While ostensibly reestablishing monastic life at the estate, Ofthor was also reorganizing settlement and land use in support of his monastery. This area was likely not completely uninhabited but comprised of a patchwork of small settlements and land holdings, including Wyre, Piddle, and Throckmorton (Hooke *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 38). As we saw in chapter 2, Fladbury became a regional trade hub that directed site activity for a number of satellite settlements.

Administrative centers like Fladbury exemplify the role church leaders played in bringing about nucleated settlements to efficiently direct peasant labor. There is reason to believe that peasants lived in close proximity to where they worked. The king’s thegns built their residences, Ann Williams writes, “sometimes encouraging or compelling their depending peasants to settle around the manor-house, and reorganizing the layout of their tenements and surrounding fields” ("A Bell-House and a Burh-Geat” 233). A similar process was at work on the church of Worcester’s estates, and the meticulous archival practices of the Church allow us to see the development of nucleated settlements and field systems through their charters. John Moreland has argued that there was a “hidden hand” of the church that sought control of the production and distribution of goods. Charters show that the hand was not hidden in the Worcester diocese. Changes to land use were

21 See also Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (191-2).

22 Charters S 1250 and S 1251 provide a list of small estates within Fladbury’s network. See David Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (41-2).

23 See Moreland, "The Significance of Production" (103).
direct and recorded in charters. The introduction of open field systems
demonstrates how the church of Worcester managed agriculture to increase
efficiency in ways that influenced peasant labor.

**Open Fields and Communal Peasant Labor**

Open field systems and efficient estate management practices mobilized
galvanized agricultural productivity. In an open field system, a settlement was
surrounded by several large fields divided into narrow strips of land cultivated by
individual peasants and their families. The previous section showed charter
evidence for settlement nucleation on many of the church of Worcester’s estates.
Those same charters demonstrate the presence and development of open field
agriculture, a field system that has long been recognized as complementary to
nucleated settlements. Charters reveal open field systems through vocabulary
associated with the practice. For example, a reference to a *furh* (furrow) or
*heofodland* (headland) is a clear marker of an open field arrangement. These
systems had discernable outcomes for peasant communities. The scale of open fields
necessitated communal farming practices that changed how peasants worked.
Teams of oxen and flocks of sheep were shared in common. Communal practices
allowed laborers to achieve the agricultural efficiency necessary to meet rent

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25 See Charles Taylor, "Nucleated Settlement: A View from the Frontier" (53-60).
obligations associated with their land and were a contributing factor in the
development of rural marketing.

Scholars have long argued that Anglo-Saxon open field systems and
nucleated settlements had a common origin. In 1883, Frederic Seebohm was the
first to suggest that nucleated settlements within open fields were the typical village
arrangement brought to England by the Anglo-Saxons’ Germanic ancestors, a theory
that held sway for much of the twentieth century.26 Recent studies by Christopher
Taylor, Glenn Foard, and Susan Oosthuizen have refined the theory nucleated
settlements and open field systems to show that the development of these patterns
was irregular or incomplete in many regions.27 On the church of Worcester’s estates,
we find nucleation and open fields are largely confined to central Worcestershire
and the Avon Valley in charter evidence.

Agricultural vocabulary in charters provides clear evidence of open fields.
Within an open field system, peasants held small plots of land dispersed within large
fields organized in strips that reduced the need to turn teams of oxen when plowing
a field.28 Several terms in charters denote the development of these open fields.

26 Frederic Seebohm in *English Village Communities* based his claims on observations of
Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire (76). Frederic Maitland and Sir Frank Stenton supported this view
(15; *Anglo-Saxon England* 280). More recently, David Hall, in 1981, traced open fields and nucleation
to before the ninth century based on field-walks in Northamptonshire. See “The Origins of Open
Field Agriculture.”

27 Taylor describes nucleation as a phased process in which middle Anglo-Saxon settlements
clustered around existing open fields in an irregular pattern at Pampisford and Whittlesford in
Cambridgeshire (53-71). Foard and Oosthuizen identify loose, informal nucleations within open
fields that co-existed with dispersed farms and hamlets at Doddington in Northamptonshire and in
the Bourn Valley in Cambridgeshire (“Systematic Fieldwalking” 370; Landscapes Decoded 146-7).
Agricultural land in general is referenced as *erðland* (ploughland) and the long strip divisions gave rise to *heafodland* (headland) features. These agricultural lands were measured using the terms *æcer* (acre) and *furlang* (furlong) and the borders of neighboring agricultural estates were demarcated by *furh* (furrow) features.\(^{29}\)

Agricultural vocabulary is recorded prominently at estates lying on Worcestershire's most fertile soils, comprised of clay and limestone, located in the Vale of Evesham at the base of a feature called the Jurassic limestone escarpment (Hooke *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 1-2).\(^{30}\) S 1347 records arable land at an estate at Caldincotan in Bredon that consists both of ploughland and meadowland.\(^{31}\) The boundary clause of the estate includes headlands and furlongs and “appears to be threading its way around the open field furlongs north of Kinsham,” an adjacent township (Hooke *Worcestershire* 309). Hooke points out that features like headlands and furlongs were not limited only to the most amenable soils and arable land was not restricted to any particular soil type ("Charters and the Landscape" 78).

Examples of acres and furlongs on relatively poor soil occur in the boundary clauses

\(^{28}\)These strip-acres were approximately twenty-two yards broad and 220 yards long (Hooke *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 192). High ridges provided natural drainage and differentiated the strips held by one peasant from those of his neighbor.

\(^{29}\)For more commentary on agricultural terms in Old English, see Ian H. Adams, *Agrarian Landscape Terms* (79-91).

\(^{30}\)Dyer points out that the Ministry of Agriculture rates much of the land in the West Midlands as grade two or three, indicating soil suitable for either arable cultivation or pasture (*Lords and Peasants* 23).

\(^{31}\)S 1347 is a charter issued in 984 by Bishop Oswald to his minister Cynelm that converted his *læn land* (loan-land) at Caldincotan to bookland. Lords bestowed loan-land in return for service and converting it bookland implies that Cynelm was relieved of dues associated with the estate. For more distinctions between loan-land and bookland, see Ann Williams, “Land Tenure” (277). For the geography of the region, see Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds* (307-9).
of estates in areas with extensive tracts of fluvio-glacial gravels at Poden Church in Honeyborne (S 1591) and Bengeworth (S 1664). Bringing wastes and poorer soils into cultivation shows that the Worcester diocese sought to maximize the productivity of their estates. Often, we only see the outcomes of that process, as seen above, but one charter reveals the mechanisms that directed field arrangements and crop selection.

Most charters that reference open field systems depict an existing process. However, one document reveals how these systems could be instituted according to the wishes of the bishop. S 1423 records three hides at Norton that were _weste læg_ ("lying waste") at the time of purchase by a layman Æthelmær. After three lives, the estate was to be handed over to the monastery at Evesham with "one man and six oxen and twenty sheep and twenty acres of sown corn." This charter does not record the transfer of a farm, but rather the establishment of one. Æthelmær was tasked with bringing the estate into cultivation and was assigned corn as a specific crop. S 1423 also implies peasants to work the land. The "man" in the charter is likely a slave but an estate this size would require a significant labor force, including a ploughman and a shepherd. It is difficult to assess why this parcel of land had not previously been farmed but technological innovations expanded the agricultural potential of many sites. The adoption of the mouldboard plough and large teams of six or more oxen allowed Anglo-Saxons to bring harder soils into cultivation (Hill

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32 Fluvioglacial deposits are comprised of mixed clay and gravel as opposed to proglacial deposits that are stratified in smoother and more continuous sheets. See A.J. Gerrard, _Soil Geomorphology_ (141).
and Kucharski 73-83). Charters indicate crop selection at other sites as well, including bean-land, barley land, wheat land, and flax land. Even though many charters only mention specific crops in boundaries, Norton, as recorded in S 1423, shows that crop selection was directed from above. An estate of this size arranged as an open field system also hints how labor might have been organized.

The cultural impact of open field agriculture on peasant communities on the church of Worcester’s estates was significant. Open fields are part of what Tom Saunders calls a “qualitative change in the character of many landscapes and settlements” (218). We saw charter evidence in the previous section of settlement nucleation as early as the eighth century in some parts of the Worcester diocese. Charters indicate open field systems on some of the church of Worcester’s largest estates. Open field systems are fundamental to our understanding of the realities of Anglo-Saxon peasant labor as a communal process, since peasants became more dependent on their neighbors to meet the demand for surplus product. In Sally Crawford’s view, peasants living in nucleated settlements who worked in highly structured field systems seem “completely separated from the self-sufficient lives of the early, rural Anglo-Saxons” (145). The development of open field systems facilitated the growth of specialized labor to plow fields with large teams of oxen and attend communal flocks and herds.

33 A mouldboard is curved blade on a plow that turns over a furrow.

34 See Hooke, The Anglo-Saxon Landscape (192).

35 For more on communal peasant labor see Kerridge, The Common Fields of England (25-34).
Open field systems highlight the communal and specialized aspects of peasant labor. Fields held in common by the community are evident in charters that reference divided arable land. For example, S 1310 describes land at Alveston, Warwickshire lying on þære gesundredan hide ("in the divided hide") and leases ðone þriddan æcer beanlandes on Biscopes dune "every other acre of beanland on the Bishop's hill"). A grant at Cudley near Worcester refers to xxx æcra on þæm twæm feldan dal landes wiðutan ("30 acres on the two open sharelands outside"). Tom Williamson outlines how common fields necessitated communal effort. Starting in the seventh century, oxen teams of six to eight gave each tenant a reasonable chance to plough his holding ("Environmental Contexts" 140). The practice of folding flocks of sheep within an open field system also encouraged communal approaches. Eric Kerridge argues that "common fields and common folds were almost inseparable, for in order to fertilize their arable the little common-field cultivators had to put their sheep in common folds" (74). To manure a pasture, sheep would be penned tightly together each night in a fold erected on one of the scattered strips of land. Kerridge argues that, for this to be effective, the flock of sheep had to be large and that could only be achieved if peasants pooled their sheep together in a common flock (25). Managing a large flock would have necessitated a communal shepherd. Erecting a fold on a different strip of land every day, along with lambing and shearing, would have preoccupied farmers to such an extent that he would have little time for growing crops (26). Meadow work in support of livestock was likely

36 For a detailed discussion of Anglo-Saxon plough teams, see Williamson, Shaping Medieval Landscapes (141-59).
another communal labor system. According to Williamson, high concentrations of meadowland attached to many estates and a short English summer gave peasants a short window to cut, turn, and stack hay ("Environmental Contexts" 141). Nucleated settlements and communal organization allowed for the rapid mobilization of men and equipment to fields, meadows, and woodlands.

**Pastures and Commodities in Woodland Areas**

Another important aspect of charter evidence for peasant life concerns management of woodlands. The church of Worcester’s woodland estates supported agricultural estates by providing pastures, fuel, and timber. Woods were a major source of revenue for the Worcester diocese. The West Midlands were heavily wooded during the Anglo-Saxon period, dense enough in certain locations to be the dominant feature of the landscape (Hooke *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 154). The woodlands were carefully managed; they provided timber for building, fuel for domestic and industrial purposes, and pasture for swine.37 Timber was used for all types of construction in Anglo-Saxon England and for most domestic and industrial utensils. Timber fueled salt furnaces that evaporated water from brine that welled up naturally at Droitwich (see Chapter 2). Peasants would have labored in these industries.

Large agricultural estates, even those with attached meadows and field rotations, often did not have enough pasture to support all of their livestock. Woodlands typically lay at the edge of an estate, but for several of the church of

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37 Sally Crawford points to the importance of wood to smelt metal ores and fire pottery kilns. See *Daily Life in Anglo-Saxon England* (129).
Worcester’s large holdings, more distant detached woodlands were included to meet the needs of the estate for pasture and timber. Charters record territorial linkages that allowed agricultural estates to make use of detached woodland pastures. The use of wood pastures was a crucial part of farming practices. Evidence of parallel trackways still evident in present-day road patterns can be traced to show where stock, primarily pigs and cows, was moved from estates to seasonal pastures (Hooke *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England* 138). Between 699 and 709, Offa of Essex granted to the church of Worcester thirty-three hides at Shottery beside the River Avon with three hides of Woodland at Nuthurst to the northwest and three additional woodland hides at Hellerelege (S 64). The land at Shottery is presumably allocated as farmland based on soil composition and activity at adjacent estates; Shottery was one of the many folk regions based in riverine areas characteristic of the West Midlands (Hooke *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 78).

To meet the intensifying demands from the church of Worcester for timber, fuel, and pastures, detached woodland estates were subjected to new practices such as coppicing or pollarding in order to preserve trees used for timber from destructive grazing animals. Charters record these methods and the conflicts that would arise over resources in private and common woods. Oliver Rackham notes that “charters do not set out the uses of woodland, but they let slip incidental details which make it clear how woods were managed and used” (*Trees and Woodland* 45).  

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38 For archaeological evidence on the distribution of woodlands in Anglo-Saxon England and more general landscape history, see Oliver Rackham, *The History of the Countryside.*
timber cultivation and pasturing. Hooke points out, “almost all buildings were of timber, from palaces to hovels, as were ships; most common utensils and many ornamental features were carved from wood” (Trees in Anglo-Saxon England 141). A charter for an estate at Seckley in Wolverley, Worcestershire includes a provision for “five wainloads of good brushwood, one oak annually and other timber necessary for building” (S 212; Hooke Worcestershire 120-5). Grazing animals were destructive to unmanaged woodlands, but coppicing and pollarding gave peasants the means to cultivate timber in active pastures. In charters, we see references to **copped** (“pollard”) trees or specifically named trees, such as *hakedes stub* (“Haked’s tree stump”) in boundary clauses (S 1342). Coppicing and pollarding encouraged trees to produce new growth on a regular basis. In coppicing, the tree is cut near the ground to produce new shoots available for harvest on a production cycle that varied from three years, for birch used for bundles of brushwood, to fifty years, for oak used for poles or firewood.39 Pollarding is a type of coppicing that removes only higher branches, allowing shoots to grow out of the reach of grazing animals.

Pigs were one of the most carefully managed animals in charter evidence and their care relates directly to woodland estates. Swine were taken to or kept in wooded regions in the late summer and autumn to fatten up on acorns and beech mast. The value of woodlands for this purpose is attested in laws. In the laws of Ine, a tree that could shelter thirty swine is valued at twice the amount of other trees

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39 For more detailed commentary on species of trees and harvest timescales, see Christopher Grocock, “Barriers to Knowledge: Coppicing and Landscape Usage.”
Attenborough 22. A boar and a number of sows formed the normal complement for all of the bishop of Worcester’s estates and charters give some indication of large herds in the woodlands of northern Worcestershire. For example, woodland on the east bank of the Spetchley River provided mast for 100 swine in 967 (S 1315). Charters also accounted for variable yields in woods. S 54 makes a specific request for mast for a herd of swine from the Church of Evesham due to the king in any year there was an abundant crop of acorns. Heavy demands for pastures led to inevitable disputes resolved in charters. As we saw in chapter three, Bishop Wærferth used Alfred’s council to argue that an encroachment had been made by one Æthelwold onto his estate at Woodchester “for mastland and woodland” (S 1441). Swine pastures held such importance that they were used in some areas to calculate the value of land according to how many herds of swine it could support.

Swine pastures exemplify the methods the church of Worcester employed to manage their assets through charters with reeves directing activity from administrative centers attached to minster churches. The estates in the Worcester diocese saw steady growth throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. There are signs that many sites operated at a surplus that generated wealth for the diocese and opened market opportunities for peasant laborers. Agriculture and animal husbandry were

40 The fine for cutting down such a tree was sixty shillings. See Hooke, “The Woodland Landscape of Early Medieval England” (151).

41 In another charter a common wood in Seekley was used as a pasture for seventy swine (S 212). See Hooke, Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds (120-5).

42 See Hooke, “The Woodland Landscape” for Domesday Book circuits assessed according to pannage capacity (151).
the backbone of the economy in the Worcester diocese. Communal farming practices in central Worcestershire and the Avon Valley increased the yields of the land. Charters trace how peasants met obligations to their lords through a system of food rents and rural marketing that both generated wealth for the diocese and gave peasants an opportunity to profit though the sale or barter of surplus product.

**Rural Marketing and Peasant Mobility**

Links between open fields and woodlands show that the church of Worcester’s estates were well organized and efficiently managed by minster churches and their reeves. There is charter evidence that many of these estates operated at a surplus. But where did the surplus product go once the immediate needs of the community were met? Some would certainly have been stored. However, much of the surplus produce and commodities generated by the church of Worcester’s estates was directed back towards the city of Worcester through a system of rural marketing. Strategies that managed land and the peasants who worked it extended to the maintenance of rural and urban marketing systems. The existence of a rural market that directed surplus produce towards Worcester is implied in charters throughout the history of the Worcester diocese, and trade and marketing intensified around Worcester with the fortification of the city in the 880s. To what extent could peasants benefit from and participate in this market?

43 There is evidence for grain storage at Ripple. See Barber et al., “Excavations at Saxon’s Lode Farm, Ryall Quarry, Ripple” (34).

44 For links between minster churches and commercial activity, see John Blair, “Minster Churches in the Landscape” (38).
Charters illustrate the marketing potential for different levels of peasants within an economic system tightly controlled from above by those who enjoyed elite status. As we saw in chapters 2 and 3, the church of Worcester obtained exclusive rights over much of the land in the Worcester diocese through charters. The estate economy directed by the bishop of Worcester was codified in charters that established economic relationships with monasteries and high-status lay tenants.

As we have seen, the peasant world lies beneath charters’ recorded economic arrangements. The heavy rents associated with the parish manorial structure exacerbated the need for elite status tenants such as thegns to generate a surplus as a source of income, and they did so largely through the labor of peasants. But to what degree could peasants participate in rural marketing? The economic agency of early Anglo-Saxon peasants before the better-recorded demense manors of the eleventh-century is the subject of much recent debate. Hodges, using late seventh-century laws about land use, argues that “Anglo-Saxon villagers were affluent” and “not the exploited, overworked peasants who suffered hardships so vividly described by cultural anthropologists” (Dark Age Economics 137-8). Hodges’ optimism on the prospects and economic agency for peasant communities in early Anglo-Saxon England has many detractors.46 The most crucial flaw in Hodges’ claim

45 See chapter 3. S 223 records an agreement between Bishop Wærferth, Ealdorman Æthelred and his wife Æthelflæd, and King Alfred of Wessex in 884 to fortify the city of Worcester in exchange for marketing rights.

46 Frantzén summarizes Hodges’ claims about prosperous Anglo-Saxon villagers and his detractors’ counterarguments. See Food, Eating, and Identity (53-6). For counterarguments, see Paul Blinkhorn, “Of Cabbages and Kings” (7); Wickham, Framing the Early Middle Ages (378-9); and John Moreland, “The Significance of Production in Eighth-Century England.”
as I read it against the situation in the Worcester diocese is his emphases on a market driven by the needs of secular elites. John Moreland point to the role Church leaders played in bringing about centralized settlements and driving agricultural production to support their sizable ecclesiastical communities (103). Such was the case in Worcester based on my assessment of charters outlined above. Nucleated settlements housed a labor force that worked in open fields and commuted to woodland zones to support the needs of minster churches and direct produce towards Worcester.

The development of Worcester as an urban market seems to have opened new trade opportunities for cultivators and specialized workers. The commercial opportunities for Worcester’s peasants of various ranks are evident in late Anglo-Saxon documents that reference food rents, travel, and market conditions. Frantzen argues that laborers link the material and textual levels of Anglo-Saxon food networks but that “workers’ energies disappeared,” leaving few material or textual traces (Food, Eating and Identity 58). Workers spent the balance of their lives in everyday contact with the tools of their trade and the administrative systems that recorded their production. Peasants used the wagons and beasts of burden that transported the feorm to the lord, and, under the right conditions, brought their own surplus to market. Piecing together the development of a regional economy at a site like Worcester is difficult with material and textual evidence that is fragmentary at best and often lacks context.47 However, charters demonstrate that many of the

47 See David Herlihy, Medieval Households (29) and Allen J. Frantzen, Food, Eating and Identity in Early Medieval England (56-58).
church of Worcester's estates operated at a surplus, and a picture of trade emerges when we follow produce from the field to the marketplace.

A market system with multiple tiers reaching from a proto-urban market at Worcester through administrative centers and nucleated villages in the hinterland is only plausible if Worcester's estates operated at a surplus. Charter evidence outlines the needs and expectations for agricultural surplus and the networks that directed it towards ecclesiastical emporia. The earlier chapters of this dissertation demonstrated that church leaders in Worcester directed settlement and secured privileges for their estates that could increase production and profit. Charters that list food rents give some indication of the scale of food renders in relation to the productive capacity of land. Worcester charters demonstrate that a system of rural marketing was in place in the Worcester diocese as early as the eighth century. Dyer argues that "the striking feature of food rents, no matter how they were collected, is the discrepancy between the relatively small quantities specified with the large size of estates that owed them" (Lords and Peasants 29). S 146, a charter issued by King Offa in 793, enumerates the food rents from Westbury-on-Trym due in support of the cathedral clergy at Worcester. Westbury owed an annual render of four ambers of meal and thirty ambers of corn. This represents the produce of approximately seventeen acres on an estate that covered many square miles (Lords and Peasants 29). The renders for ale, meat, cheese and other items likewise represent a small percentage of the resources of the estate and these numbers alone do not suggest

48 For the development of ecclesiastical emporia and trading networks, see John Moreland, “The Significance of Production in Eighth-Century England.”
very large flocks or herds of sheep or cows. Poor yields of grain could not account these small figures, and even if we account for the sizable needs of the episcopal household of Westbury not recorded in the rent due to Worcester, the productive capacity of the estate exceeds its needs and demands for surplus. A charter listing food rents due from Kempsey, an estate at least twice the size of Westbury, owed even less (Finberg *West Midlands* No. 253). Their render of 600 loaves of bread was the yield of approximately five acres (Dyer *Lords and Peasants* 29). Dyer attributes this discrepancy to the loose administration of estates operating on a tribute rather than a market system. That is, the estate did not reach its potential under the management of lords who “did not squeeze their tenants very thoroughly” (*Lords and Peasants* 30).

Another possibility is that a rural market, typically associated with later Anglo-Saxon England, did exist, thus enabling peasants to sell or trade their surplus of perishable foodstuffs. Charter evidence for surplus produce at the church of Worcester’s estates intersects with debates in archaeology on the yields of early Anglo-Saxon farmers and the transition from a tribute to a market system. Roads and regular field layout indicate a highly organized Romano-British landscape of interconnected farmsteads in the Worcester diocese (Barber, Watts and Alexander 78). The extent to which these networks were preserved in the early Anglo-Saxon period is unknown. Late Anglo-Saxon land exploitation was so extensive that it

49 This charter was not indexed by Sawyer and survives only as a nineteenth-century transcription. See William Dugdale, *Monasticon* (554).

50 For more on the likelihood that early Anglo-Saxon farmers produced a surplus, see Richard Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement* (136–9).
wiped out most traces of the systems it replaced. However, charters record a system of roads leading to Worcester with names that indicate commercial activity, such as *port stræt* ("market road") or *sealstret* ("salt road"). Fortified markets "offered to traders bases for their operations more secure than could be found in the open country, and the means of establishing the validity of their transactions but the testimony of responsible persons of their own sort" (Stenton 528). S 1342 references a *port stræt* running from Worcester to Hartlebury, approximately one mile east. Charters also record market roads for more rural estates, such as the *port stræt* in an 11th century clause of Pensax (S 1595). Only the bounds of S 1595 survive but its market road likely extended into Tenbury, a far western extension of Worcestershire (Hooke "Hinterlands" 44). Peasants would use the same carts and horses they used to fulfill obligations to their lord to trade their own goods in these markets. Charters refer to tolls peasants paid when entering the Worcester market as a *wægn scilling*, "wagon shilling," or *seampending*, "pack-load penny" (S 223).

The capacity of peasants to participate in the market likely was dependent on their status and the nature of their labor. Frantzen points out the needs of the wealthy were met by their own "provisioning networks" and imports that marked their elite status; peasants were largely excluded from trade networks and produced what they needed but were "nonetheless embedded in rural networks of rural production and distribution" (*Food, Eating and Identity* 55). Specialized

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51 See Hooke, “The Hinterland and Routeways” (43-7).

52 Hooke identifies *stræt* routes as sign of an important roadway, as opposed to less important *weg* ("a way") routes ("Hinterlands" 43).
workers who tended to valuable assets, like swine or honey, were granted greater access to the market than common farm workers, but levels of status for peasants are difficult to analyze in Anglo-Saxon England, particularly from the seventh to the ninth century. Finberg argued that Anglo-Saxon landowners inherited a subordinate peasant class from their Romano-British predecessors and simply adapted a Roman model to their needs (Withington 59-65). Dyer argues against this view; he points to social upheavals of the fifth and sixth centuries that halted commodities production and likely disrupted relations between peasants and their superiors, leading to the emergence of a new system of labor (Lords and Peasants 33). Our most direct evidence for the obligations and privileges of various classes of peasants comes from the eleventh-century Rectitudines Singularum Personarum (RSP), a handbook that describes the rights and obligations of various classes of tenants and functionaries on an Anglo-Saxon estate.53 This evidence cannot be directly applied to earlier periods but gives some indication of access to market systems for various levels of peasants.54

53 The Rectitudines Singularum Personarum is the only systematic record of rights and obligations of workers and tenants on an Anglo-Saxon estate. The text was copied in the late eleventh or early twelfth century and survives in a single manuscript (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 383). For a full description of the manuscript see P.D.A Harvey, “Rectitudines Singularum Personarum and Gerefa.” The Domesday Book is a manuscript record of William the Conqueror’s 1086 survey of how much each landholder had in land and livestock. See Domesday Book (Ed. Ann Williams and G.H. Martin). The standard edition of the RSP remains Liebermann’s 1903 Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen. It was translated into English by D.C. Douglass and G.W. Greenway, English Historical Documents II, 1042-1189 (875-9). For commentary on the text, see Dyer, “St Oswald and 10000 West Midland Peasants.”

54 See Christopher Dyer, “St Oswald and 10000 West Midland Peasants” (174-93) for an application of eleventh century Domesday evidence to St Oswald’s episcopate in the tenth century. For Dyer’s work on the Worcester diocese from the seventh to the ninth century, see Lords and Peasants in a
The account of working life in the RSP shows the possibilities and constraints on marketing for various classes of peasants. Frantzen observes that the RSP “refers to social levels seen in other Anglo-Saxon sources” and that the “text describes working relations among those who labor within food networks” (Food, Eating and Identity 218). The RSP focuses much of its attention on the major contributors to the labor supply of the estate—the kotsetla and the gebur.55 Kotsetlas spent a quarter of their working days (Mondays and three days per week during the harvest) fulfilling obligations for their lord, while geburs spent three working days per week (Monday thru Wednesday) on these duties (4,3). The kotsetla worked sixty days and the gebur worked 137 days for their lord within a working year of approximately 250 days (Dyer "St Oswald" 185). Peasant stratification created a system of mutual dependence whereby kotsetlas had large enough holdings to need to hire labor and a surplus to with which to pay them, while geburs would need to buy food and sell labor to supplement their small holdings. With the expansion of towns around Worcester in the tenth century, peasants were drawn to the city for textiles and leather goods. The gebur needed to sell enough to pay rents and taxes in money, “but also acquired cash to spend on goods he could not grow or make himself” (Dyer "St Oswald" 190). Kotsetlas would have greater flexibility to participate in wider markets because their lighter service obligations left more time for travel and their larger holdings would produce more surplus produce to sell. However, both geburs

Changing Society: The Estates of the Bishopric of Worcester, 680-1540 (Chapter 1). Dyer’s treatment of the early Anglo-Saxon period is brief compared to more documented later periods but nevertheless provides valuable commentary on charter evidence for settlement, land use and trade.

55 The gebur and the kotsetla correspond to the villanus and the bordarius of the Domesday Book.
and *kotsetlas* were limited by their calendar. They spent most of their time in the field, and the chances to market goods were limited.

Other peasant classes had even greater entrepreneurial opportunities than the heavily burdened *geburs* and *kotsetlas*. Beekeepers could keep their produce to use or sell after they rendered their annual five sesters of honey. The *RSP* references beekeepers who "hold a swarm subject to payment" (5,2). Wild bees likely frequented the banks of the numerous brooks with “honey” in their names. The estate at Beoly likely means “bee-keeper’s clearing” (Hooke *Anglo-Saxon Landscape* 157). Honey was a form of render upon several church estates, including Little Witley, Fladbury, and Cleeve Prior (157). S 1861 records four vessels of honey due to Winchcombe abbey in the ninth century. These amounts are a fraction of what could be collected from wild bee hives and, much like other *feorms*, imply surplus product that could be sold by peasants at market. Like bee-keepers, swineherds were classified as free peasants by the late Anglo-Saxon period. According to the *RSP*, swineherds owed a render of fifteen pigs per year but the rest of their herd was their to do with as they wished, which gives them “an entrepreneurial air” that indicates rural marketing (Liebermann 6,1; Dyer "St Oswald" 187). The *RSP* demonstrates that despite the demands of landowners for tribute and taxes, peasants had some degree of freedom over their produce.

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56 *RSP* 5,1. A sester is a measure of both liquid and dry goods. The value is uncertain and seems to have varied throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. See Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (79).

57 Entries in the *RSP* are organized into twenty-one short chapters. See Felix Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Anglesachsen*. Vol 1.
Frantzen observes the *RSP* is a description of “working relations among those who labor within food networks” that demonstrates “every producer is also a consumer” (Food, Eating and Identity 218). I would add that within markets like the Worcester diocese, most producers are also sellers. All peasants had a stake in the productive capacity of the land and the fruits of their labor and specialized workers produced far more than they could consume or pay as tribute.

**The Boundaries of Charter Evidence**

Charters lack the degree of depth on the obligations and rights of stratified peasant classes found in the *RSP* but offer a clearer view of conditions at specific estates. The charters issued to the church of Worcester are also almost our only documentary evidence of peasant life in the diocese from the seventh through the tenth century. Systems of rural marketing before the growth of towns in the late ninth century remains a top research priority for Anglo-Saxon archaeologists (Hooke "Archaeological Agenda" 159). Little is known about regional market sites outside of Worcester where goods were produced, collected, and distributed. Charters indicate a rich variety of site activities at Worcester’s estates beyond farming and animal husbandry that dominated the economy. Mills, fisheries, quarries, and workshops for metal and textile goods dotted the landscape and indicate a specialized arm of the workforce. The church of Worcester directed site activity at dozens of places we can locate through charters, and the bounds and terms of those grants reveal settlement patterns, labor, and marketing that can be fleshed out through new archeological investigations or re-examinations of existing
data. In her overview of existing archaeological priorities, Hooke argues that the
difficulty of dating areas of specific land use and early field systems should not
dissuade archaeologists from studying them ("Archaeological Agenda" 167).
Charters can refine the diagnostics of archaeological investigations. The meticulous
records of the Worcester archive that secured control of estates also record the lives
of those who worked the land. Peasant labor is a constant element of life in the
Worcester diocese, to be sure, and, unfortunately, charters do not often mention
their work directly. Nonetheless, as many scholars have asserted, we know that
these people lived and we know about at least some of what they did. We should,
therefore, continue to look for evidence of their lives, their work, and their culture.
CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

In the preface to his landmark volume on Christ Church, Canterbury, Nicholas Brooks remarked that an attempt to write a critical history of a major church in the Early Middle Ages requires a scholar to be a "Jack-of-many-trades" (Canterbury xii). Brooks drew on evidence from archaeology, architecture, the liturgy, paleography, art history, hagiography, diplomatic, and other fields to explore the fortunes of Christ Church.¹ No scholar has attempted a comparably comprehensive approach to the history of the Worcester diocese, but some recent studies focused on political history, spiritual life, and the landscape have captured the spirit of Brooks’ work and begun productive interdisciplinary conversations about the church of Worcester.² My approach to the textual history of Worcester, which I hope pursues the direction of work by Brooks and others, builds on the relatively recent view that charters can be used to study more than the legal transactions and the official world they address directly. I attempt to link the diplomatic and historical contexts of charters to fluid processes of settlement, land exploitation, and trade on the bishops’ estates. In concluding this study, I hope to demonstrate the overarching theme that unites the chapters of this dissertation.

¹ Brooks’ 1984 The Early History of the Church of Canterbury, Christ Church from 597-1066 is the first, and arguably still the best, study of the archives of a single major English church.

² See Patrick Sims-Williams, Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800; Francesca Tinti, Sustaining Belief; and Della Hooke, The Anglo-Saxon Landscape.
Daily life comprised the activities of not only ordinary people—the clerics, the monks, and the layfolk—but also those who enjoyed elite status—the bishops, the kings, and their agents. The acts of bishops recorded in charters that secured, protected, and managed their estates had discernable outcomes for everyone who lived and worked in these places. My dissertation brings together two worlds that are often studied separately: the dynamic administrative landscape of kings, bishops, and their agents and the world of labor and small-scale trade comprised of ordinary people such as monks, clerics, and laborers. In order to understand what charters can tell us about how Anglo-Saxons lived and worked in both of those worlds, I have explored the structure of charters, the episcopates of bishops who issued them, and the local outcomes of charters for those who held, managed, and labored on estates in the Worcester diocese.

Charters were structured to include participants from multiple status levels and framed using formulas that assert authority. My first chapter addressed three audiences of Anglo-Saxon charters: ecclesiastical elites mentioned by name in the documents, later generations of churchmen who copied and used charters, and those of lower status who were bound by the terms of the documents. I explored how bishops used formulas to communicate the stability and power of the diocese in their charters. Proems, sanctions, blessings, and other stylized features framed details about places, rights and privileges. Charters were structured to become the official account of an estate and they were so effective that bishops decades or even
centuries later would use charters to thwart challenges to their estates. Charters retained their authority even when they were copied. The production of cartularies gave bishops an opportunity to alter old charters and fabricate new ones to claim new privileges. These processes necessitated the discipline of Anglo-Saxon diplomatic to assess charter copies, the form of most surviving charters, for authenticity. Chapter 1 argued that charters, with their prevailing focus on elite culture, represented and impacted all levels of Anglo-Saxon life.

Chapter 2 developed a history of economics, politics, and land use in the Worcester diocese through analysis of the administrations of its early bishops. The period from the foundation of the Worcester diocese in 680 through the reign of King Offa (757-96) demonstrated that charters were a key component of bishops’ strategies to improve their position in relation to secular authority and rival religious houses. Charters enumerated the terms of use for individual estates and tended to reflect the larger goals of ecclesiastical and secular elites. Charters allow us to see how bishops like Mildred (743-75) adjusted to the transition from Hwiccian to Mercian rule in the 780s. The Worcester diocese framed itself as a Hwiccian entity well into the ninth century and had a mixed relationship with Mercian kings like Offa.3 While Offa was generous with many donations, he also reclaimed a number of estates from the diocese and propped up his proprietary monasteries like Winchecombe to maintain an air of piety without concentrating too much wealth in the hands of the diocese. Worcester’s bishops maneuvered through

3 See Yorke, Kings and Kingdoms (for the relationship of Worcester’s bishops to Offa (269).
royal diplomas to insulate themselves from secular claims to their estates and to claim resources from independent monasteries like Beckford and Berkeley, eventually securing control of the monasteries themselves.⁴

In chapter 3, I showed how Bishops Alhhun (845-72) and Wærferth (873-915) saw the Worcester diocese through the transition from Mercian to West Saxon rule after a series of devastating Viking invasions. This chapter illustrated the ways that sweeping historical events, such as Viking wars and occupations, impacted life on the local level. While Vikings never seem to have disrupted the bishops’ estates directly, the last independent Mercian kings Burgred (852-74) and Ceolwulf II (874-79) were forced into costly battles and expensive payoffs to their Viking enemies.⁵ Alhhun (845-72) and Wærferth (873-915) turned this political turmoil to their advantage by using charters to purchase new rights and privileges for their estates.⁶ This, in turn, allowed bishops to direct more goods and revenue towards the regional market rather than to the king. Wærferth presided over the diocese during the transition to West Saxon rule under King Alfred, who, with his ealdorman Æthelred, took a more active role in the administration the city of Worcester than the Mercians did.⁷ Despite reduced powers of governance in the city of Worcester, the construction of fortifications and an amicable relationship with Alfred allowed

⁴ S 1187 records part of the litigious relationship between the Worcester diocese and Berkeley monastery.


⁶ See Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape* (117-120) and Tinti, *Sustaining Belief* (9-14).

⁷ See Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred* (54-63).
Wærferth to secure valuable trading rights and negotiate favorable rulings in land disputes recorded in charters.

Chapter 4 centered on another of Worcester’s famous bishops. Oswald expanded and revised the lease program of the diocese to concentrate much of the church’s land in the hands of lay tenants who could stimulate the economy and protect monastic estates through military service. This chapter illustrated that spiritual matters were never separate from practical realities. Oswald’s efforts to reshape leases and land use in the diocese should be understood in relation to his efforts to reform monasticism. The reform of monasteries and installation of Benedictine monks is a major theme in tenth-century religious prose. A cathedral community of monks took shape in Worcester at this time in the newly constructed church of St. Mary but the clerical community at St. Peter’s remained active throughout Oswald’s episcopate. Oswald was a moderate reformer who made prolific use of charters to protect his assets and showed no desire to disrupt the economy of the diocese in the name of spiritual reform. Oswald issued charters to clerics, peasants, and high-status laymen to place estates under the control of people he trusted to create a network of servants, craftsmen, clerics, and thegns who could carry out the daily business of the diocese and, in the case of thegns, provide military protection for his monastic foundations.

See Julia Barrow, “How the Twelfth Century Monks at Worcester Perceived Their Past” for an account of twelfth-century narratives on the monastic reforms at Winchester, Canterbury, and Worcester in the tenth century.
My final chapter investigated where peasants lived and how they worked on the church of Worcester’s estates. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 framed an analysis of where peasants lived and worked from the seventh through the tenth century by demonstrating how charters were used throughout the history of the diocese to manage assets. Labor is an asset that is largely unaccounted for directly in charters, making peasant life difficult to study through documents. Charter evidence for life on the ground is not as direct as evidence of elite relationships. However, as documents addressing the possession and use of land, charters show the character of settlements, the arrangement of fields, and the development of markets. Under the direction of bishops and their agents, peasant settlements coalesced around minster churches in a process called nucleation. Nucleated settlements have long been associated with open field agriculture, whereby peasants were assigned long strips in fields surrounding peasant villages. Charters and material evidence indicate that these fields were farmed using communal strategies that pooled labor and resources. Charters record how bishops created a network of estates with complementary resources oriented towards the market. Through analysis of tenth- and eleventh-century evidence, a picture emerges of peasant participation in the exchange and sale of surplus product. A network of roads connected trading centers

9 See Dyer, Lords and Peasants for a discussion of documentary evidence of peasant conditions (34-5).

10 For commentary on nucleation as a process, see Susan Oosthuizen, “Medieval Field Systems and Settlement Nucleation.”

11 See Hooke, “Charters and the Landscape” (76).

at Worcester and smaller sites to the hinterland, and this system of rural marketing is well represented in charters beginning in the tenth century. The periods after those covered in this dissertation continued this and many other systems.

Charters were drafted to record rights associated with land for those in the highest positions of secular and ecclesiastical power. Study of that world demonstrates how bishops used charters to establish, grow, and protect their estates, the primary source of revenue for their ecclesiastical community. I plan to pursue future work on this topic in two directions. First, I plan to extend my approach to charters into the economic systems and labor in the Worcester diocese in the eleventh century. Bishop Wulfstan II (1062-95) took over a diocese in shambles ravaged by a series of Danish invasions and a succession of weak bishops stretched too thin by political turmoil and responsibilities outside of the Worcester diocese. Wulfstan II reinvigorated the monastic community and initiated a program that directed the monk Hemming and his contemporaries to take better care of their archives at Worcester, which led them to update and make copies of early charters. The resulting text, *Hemming’s Cartulary*, combined charters with a narrative of the deprivation of property once owned by the church of Worcester.

13 For example, Bishop Ealdred (1046-62) was simultaneously the bishop of Ramsbury, Hereford, Worcester, and archbishop of York. He neglected his duties in Worcester and was forced to vacate the see by the pope in 1061. See Vanessa King, “Ealdred, Archbishop of York” (124-37). Under Ealdred’s predecessor, Lyfing (1038-46) the cathedral community dropped in number from over fifty to twelve (Tinti Sustaining Belief 49).

14 See Tinti, *Sustaining Belief* (317-8).

15 As discussed in Chapter 1, Hemming’s Cartulary (BL Cotton Tiberius A. xiii) is comprised of two cartularies: *Liber Wigornensis*, from the early eleventh century and *Hemming’s Cartulary Proper*, composed by Hemming in the late eleventh or early twelfth century. See Ker, “Hemming’s Cartulary.”
The eleventh century cartularies are where, according to Tinti, “the new voice, aspirations, and preoccupations of the Worcester monastic community emerge most clearly” (Sustaining Belief 315-6). I will identify how new archival practices impacted the ways the Worcester diocese accounted for and managed their estates and outcomes for laborers in these places.

Second, I plan to pursue ways to make charters more accessible and useful to wider audiences by editing a sample of texts in an electronic edition. While developing the topic for dissertation, I quickly discovered that I would be relying on charter copies written centuries after the events they recorded. Working from cartulary copies presents many challenges. For example, scholars are wise to be hesitant about how far to push a claim about an ninth-century estate often surviving in one charter persevered in an eleventh century cartulary. For the Worcester archive in particular, the problem is exacerbated by the lack of a modern scholarly edition. Without the resources to study the charter manuscripts in person, I relied on nineteenth century editions by J.M. Kemble, Walter de Gray Birch and the selections of charters covered by Dorothy Whitelock, and A.J. Robertson, along with

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16 See Simon Keynes, “Anglo-Saxon Charters: Lost and Found” for an account of the twenty-two surviving original charters from the Worcester archive. Many more survived into the Early Modern period but were lost to sale, fire, and theft (57-9).

17 See the scholarship on § 180, a charter from 816 that grants a number of estates to the Worcester diocese. It is a crucial charter because the estates mentioned formed much of the original endowment of the diocese, but the grant survives as an eleventh-century copy, and some doubt its authenticity. See Cubitt, Anglo-Saxon Church Councils (285).

18 An three-volume edition of Worcester archive charters from the British Academy-Royal Historical Society Joint Committee on Anglo-Saxon Charters is currently listed as “In prospect.” See Kemble: The Anglo-Saxon Charters Website.
Latin and Old English transcriptions in *The Electronic Sawyer*.\(^{19}\) Sawyer records a rich body of scholarship on charters that summarizes scholarly opinion on authenticity and topography; nevertheless, Nicholas Brooks pointed out that doubts and controversy about a good number of charters are “unlikely to be resolved until relevant volumes of the new editions of the pre-Conquest charters have appeared in print, with the necessary combination of diplomatic, linguistic, paleographical and topographical analysis” ("Anglo-Saxon Charters" 202).

I am preparing a pilot electronic edition of a selection of Worcester archive charters that relate to the salt industry. As I have shown throughout the dissertation, salt was a major commodity and source of revenue that is recorded in Worcester archive charters. My approach will bring editions of the texts, commentary on salt processing, trade, archaeological evidence, maps of estates and roads, and secondary sources. An electronic project such as this, which would initially be small, holds promise to bring charters to scholars who otherwise might not ever use them. Peter Shillingsburg outlines the structure and best practices for “knowledge sites,” electronic archives that have the potential to bring together textual data, analysis, contextual data, and material evidence.\(^{20}\) A key principle for knowledge sites, according to Shillingsburg, is “to provide access in such a way that

\(^{19}\) See Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Saxonici*; Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*; Whitelock, *English Historical Documents, 500-1042*; and Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*. *The Electronic Sawyer* records a rich body of scholarship on charters that summarizes scholarly opinion on authenticity and topography.

\(^{20}\) See Shillingsburg, *From Guttenberg to Google* (100-1). Frantzen argues knowledge sites for Anglo-Saxon “ordinary things” could bring objects associated with eating and food preparation, objects rarely discussed in literary analysis, to a wider scholarly audience (*Food, Eating, and Identity* 9).
growth and development of the knowledge site is encouragingly easy; and to
provide tools that allow individuals to personalize their own access to the work”
(100). *The Electronic Sawyer* and companion site *Kemble: The Anglo-Saxon Charters
Website* include descriptions of archives, summaries of charter formulas, and
database of charters, manuscripts, and bibliography of secondary sources are
essential tools for scholarly work on charters; however, aspects of the site, such as a
lack of translations, limits the audience to specialists.  To reach a wider audience, a
knowledge site on charters should include charter transcriptions, translations,
commentary on estates, and digital tools that allow users to see where an estate was
located, its topography, and resources. A knowledge site for charters that
foregrounds their material realities—places, people, and trade—could bring texts
that are often seen as cryptic into view for a new audience of scholars and students.

Scholars who study poetry and prose rarely use charters as a source of
evidence despite the fact that charters make up a substantial percentage of
surviving Anglo-Saxon documents. Charters have rich potential for scholars of
literature because they record both approaches to writing and the landscape.

Nicholas Howe wrote, “If one moves tentatively” through charters “one can learn
something about those who lived on the land and worked it, who did not travel far,
and whose horizons were shaped less by written texts than by the landscape where

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21 Future digital work would be wise to find ways to integrate with *The Electronic Sawyer*, as some
projects have already done. See *Langscape*, an online searchable database of Anglo-Saxon estate
boundaries. The site is edited by Janet Nelson and hosted by King’s College London. It is still in Beta
and was last updated in 2008, and it is unclear if it will be updated further. *Langscape* links boundary
clauses to entries in *The Electronic Sawyer*. 
they were born, labored, worshiped and died” (32). An electronic edition of charters that includes translations, commentary, and user options for organizing and tagging data from charters could bring charters out of the specialized arena of historians and archaeologists into wider scholarly conversations.

My electronic project will also bring charters into the classroom. In the introduction, I discussed how, as a professor teaching surveys and introductory courses on Old English literature and language, I look for opportunities to bring everyday life into lectures and discussions. The heroic and elegiac poetry, saints’ lives, and homilies that dominate the syllabus present an idealized, and often unfamiliar, world to students. Ælfric’s Colloquy is one of the few, and the most anthologized, Anglo-Saxon text that connects with familiar tasks like farming and fishing. We should remember, however, the purpose of the text was to teach language, and it has limits for what it can tell us about the particulars of the skilled and unskilled labor it describes. In reference to its account of fishing, Frantzen writes, “The children being educated by The Colloquy are learning about Latin grammar and vocabulary, not about marine or freshwater methods of fishing” (72).²² Farm workers in The Colloquy, such as a ploughman, an oxherd, and a shepherd, remark on the importance of their labor and a picture emerges of interdependence.²³ However, these descriptions lack the depth and fluidity we find in charters that regulated the Anglo-Saxon agricultural world.

²² For more on the pedagogical context of the The Colloquy, see Frantzen, Food, Eating, and Identity (76-7).

²³ See G.N. Garmonsway, Ælfric’s Colloquy (20-22).
Charters enhance finer details of The Colloquy’s picture of labor by demonstrating the complexities of farm work on a large estate, by quantifying what peasants might owe, and illustrating what the ploughman means when he says, “I am not free.” Dyer writes, “The primary need of the landowner was the same throughout the Anglo-Saxon period—ample supplies of foodstuffs for the bishop, the cathedral clergy, and their entourage of servants and guests” (Lords and Peasants 28). These foodstuffs were gathered from the peasants of an estate and some charters note precise measures and forms of food and commodities. S 359 describes the food render due from peasants at Hurstbourne Priors:

First from every hide [they must render] 40 pence at the autumnal equinox, and 6 church mitan of ale and 3 sesters of wheat for bread, and [they must] plough 3 acres in their own time and sow them with their own seed and bring it to the barn in their own time, and [give] 3 pounds of barley as rent, and [mow] half an acre of meadow as rent in their own time, and make it into a rick, and [supply] 4 fother of split wood as rent, made into a stack in their own time, and [supply] 16 poles of fencing as rent likewise in their own time, and at Easter [they shall give] two ewes with two lambs—and we [reckon] two young sheep to a full-grown sheep—and they must wash and shear them in their own time, and work as they are bidden every week except three—one at midwinter, the second at Easter, the third at the Rogation Days.

This food render illustrates how charters directed labor and constrained time for peasants. In the Colloquy, the ploughman tells us, “For not even in the bitter winter would I dare to stay at home for fear of my lord.” The Colloquy defines a peasant working day; the charter defines a working year.

In the classroom, a charter like this opens the discussion of everyday life for peasants who comprised approximately ninety percent of the Anglo-Saxon.

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24 See Hooke, Anglo-Saxon Landscape for a discussion of this charter (200).
population.\textsuperscript{25} It is also important to recognize that the items enumerated above are due per hide. Unfamiliar measures of land (hides) and wood (sesters) presented with more familiar units like pounds and acres encourage memorable class activities to sort out what these units mean.\textsuperscript{26} To meet these obligations peasants must have worked as a community. Oxen would have been shared to plow the fields as workers would cut wood and mow meadows. Women worked as well, opening discussions about gender. Christine Fell points out on small estates “men and women shared generally in many tasks as they need to be done” (48).\textsuperscript{27} Charters remain largely the purview of scholars with specialized research interests rather than introductory students encountering Anglo-Saxon texts and culture for the first time. Charters are typically not included in anthologies covering Old English literature.\textsuperscript{28} An electronic edition of charters can supplement the textbook and has the advantage of integrating with a classroom environment that is moving towards e-books and other electronic resources both in online and face-to-face classes. A learning objectives for “Introduction to Old English Literature” states that students should be able to relate Old English literature to contemporary life, and I can think

\textsuperscript{25} For population estimates, see Dyer, “St Oswald and 10,000 West Midland Peasants.”

\textsuperscript{26} For variable sizes of hides in Anglo-Saxon England, see Martin J. Ryan, “That 'Dreary Old Question': the Hide in Early Anglo-Saxon England.” Sesters were used as both a liquid and dry measure. See Robertson, Anglo-Saxon Charters (272).

\textsuperscript{27} See also Frantzen, Food, Eating, and Identity (99).

\textsuperscript{28} For an anthology, see, Old and Middle English c. 890-c. 1450: An Anthology (Ed. Elaine Treharne). An anthology that does include some commentary on charters is Poems and Prose from the Old English (Ed. B. Raffel and A. Olsen) but the included texts are all wills.
of no better way to do that than to introduce charters, for these text, as we have
seen, were steeped in everyday experiences.
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VITA

Kevin Caliendo was born in Dayton, Ohio but grew up in several states including California, Ohio, Massachusetts, Texas, and Oklahoma. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, he attended the University of Oklahoma where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in English in 2004. He attended OU for his graduate work as well, earning a Master of Arts in English in 2007. Caliendo has specialized in Old and Middle English literature throughout his graduate career with a secondary emphasis in textual studies. He wrote his MA thesis on angels in Old English literature.

At Loyola University Chicago, Caliendo studied under Dr. Allen Frantzen as a teaching assistant for courses in Old English literature and as a research assistant for Dr. Peter Shillingsburg. During his time as a research assistant, Caliendo was a team member on various projects for the Center for Textual Studies and Digital Humanities. Caliendo’s dissertation on the Anglo-Saxon charters of the Worcester archive grew out of discussions and encouragement from Dr. Frantzen to investigate daily life and land use after having spent much of his previous work on intellectual history. He has presented on topics related to this dissertation at the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, MI, the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists conferences in Newfoundland and Ireland, the Modern Languages Association Convention, and at various graduate student conferences.
Currently, Caliendo is an Assistant Professor of English at Rose State College in Midwest City, Oklahoma, where he also directs the Honors Program and teaches courses in English composition and early English literature. With generous funding from Rose State College and the skilled assistance of Rose State’s computer science honors students, Caliendo is working on an electronic edition of a selection of Anglo-Saxon charters that will include transcriptions, translations, scholarly commentary on the texts and any material evidence for estates they mention, and a database of words relating to settlement, field systems, and trade. A goal of this work is to bring charters to wider audiences of scholars and students to demonstrate the potential of charters to connect with other types of texts as evidence for Anglo-Saxon daily life.