EYNSHAM ABBEY

Benedictine abbey of St Mary, St Benedict, & All Saints

County of Oxford : Diocese of Lincoln
Founded 1005; perhaps refounded c.1095

The archive includes acts for Abbot Columbanus
and for Stow Abbey (Lincs)

The cartulary of Eynsham Abbey has preserved the texts of three pre-Conquest charters for the two institutions of Stow and Eynsham, together with six acts of William I or William II, and an act of Bishop Remigius, dated 1091, establishing an abbey at Stow. The eleventh-century history of the two institutions has been reconstructed from these documents and certain other charters, together with references in the Domesday Survey and the brief accounts given by William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, and Adam of Eynsham. The evidence is usually interpreted as showing that whatever was left of the pre-Conquest communities at both Eynsham and Stow was entirely dissipated in the aftermath of the Conquest. Bishop Remigius’s act of 1091 re-established the monastery at Stow, appointed Columbanus to be its abbot, confirmed its endowment, and assigned the church of Eynsham and its lands to the abbey. But Remigius died in 1092, and his successor Robert Bloet, no friend of monks, closed Stow abbey soon after his consecration, and sent its monks to Eynsham, in his diocese but 120 miles away, where Columbanus continued as abbot. A diploma of Henry I dated 1109
marked the formal re-establishment of the abbey at Eynsham. Careful examination, however, shows that several important documents are suspicious and cannot be relied on. Much that has been written relies on these dubious documents and so a reassessment is required. The table summarises which documents are accepted as authentic, and which are not, in the following analysis.

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1 The entwined history of the foundations at Stow and Eynsham in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries has been discussed by ‘Sr Elspeth’ (VCH Lincs, ii. 118), H. E. Salter (VCH Oxon, ii. 65–7; Ctl. Eynsham, vol. i, pp. vii–xiii), D. Bates (Bishop Remigius, 30–32), Eric Gordon (Eynsham Abbey, passim), P. Sawyer (Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire (Lincoln, 1998), 246–52), and Alan Hardy and John Blair (Aelfric’s Abbey, 3–15).
The cartulary of Eynsham opens with a remarkable diploma of King Æthelred II for the minster (monasterium) at Eynsham, confirming its refoundation as a Benedictine abbey by Æthelmaer (who had received the minster by an exchange with his son-in-law Æthelweard) and specifying the endowment in detail. The charter is dated 1005 and is accepted as authentic (S 911; Ctl. Eynsham, i. 19–28, no. 1). J. Blair has listed references to Eynsham before that date, and concludes that ‘there is no reason to think that Eynsham was any less important than the Gloucestershire and Worcestershire minsters which are documented in fine detail from the late 7th century onwards’ (J. Blair, ‘The foundation and development of Eynsham Abbey: the Anglo-Saxon phases’, Ælfric’s Abbey, 3–10, at p. 3; see also VCH Oxon, xii. 103–4 and S. Kelly, ‘An early minster at Eynsham, Oxfordshire’, in A Commodity of Good Names: Essays in Honour of Margaret Gelling, ed. O. J. Padel and D. N. Parsons (Donington, 2008), 79–85.

The early history of the minster at Stow is attested by an agreement between Bishop Wulfwig and Earl Leofric and his wife Godiva, which has also been accepted as authentic (S 1478). This is copied immediately after King Æthelred’s charter. The agreement is datable to 1053 × 1055 from the witness of Earl Sigeweard, who died in 1055, and of Leofwine, bishop of Lichfield, consecrated in 1053. Leofric and Godiva wanted to endow the minster (monasterium), and had furnished it with priests and intended it to follow the liturgical model of St Paul’s cathedral in London. The wording of the act suggests that the minster had been in existence since at least the time of Æthelric, bishop of Dorchester 1016–1034:

. . . and the lands that they assign thither shall be for food and clothing of the brethren who are therein, and the bishop shall have to his feorm all those things that Bishop Æthelric and Bishop Eadnoth had before him from these things that pertain rightfully to his bishopric, that is two parts of everything that comes into the monastery, and the priests shall have the third part, with the exception of the two masses . . .

This document is followed by a fabricated act in the name of ‘Godiva, wife of Leofric, earl (consul) of England’, asking Pope Victor (1054–1057) to confirm the gifts she had made to Stow for the redemption of the soul of her husband, namely Newark, Fledborough, Brampton, and Marton in Well Wapentake (S 1233; Ctl. Eynsham, i. 31–2, no. 2). The
pope’s confirmation is shown by the addition of his signum and anathema to the document. As Salter noted, ‘papal confirmations were not granted in the form of an addition or endorsement to a petition, and the formula of confirmation and the anathema do not correspond with those in use in the papal chancery at this time’. There are also difficulties with the witnesses, in particular that of ‘Aldredus presul electus ad archiepiscopalem sedem Dorobernensis ecclesie’. Ealdred became archbishop of York after the death of Cynesige in December 1060, and held the province until his death in September 1069. There was no archbishop of Canterbury of that name.

The minster at Stow, refounded and rebuilt by Leofric and Godiva, remains an important Lincolnshire landmark. Most of the surviving Anglo-Saxon work, comprising the central crossing and transepts, is thought to date from a rebuilding following the refoundation of 1053 × 1055, on the foundations and lower walls of an earlier church that had been destroyed by fire.2

Although Earl Leofric and Godiva made their agreement with the bishop of Dorchester, other evidence shows that the archbishops of York believed that Stow belonged to them. Cynesige, archbishop of York 1051–60, is said to have given bells to Beverley, Southwell and Stow (Raine, Historians of the Church of York, ii. 344). Bishop Wulfwig claimed that Lindsey as a whole had been seized by Ælfric, archbishop of York 1023–1051. He obtained a bull of Pope Nicholas II, dated 3 May 1061, confirming to him, as bishop of Dorchester, ‘parochiam Lindisi ecclesiamque Stou cum Newerca et appendiciis quas inuuset Aluricus archiepiscopus Eboracensis inuasit’ (Registrum Antiquissimum, i. 186–7, no. 247), but this did not settle the matter, and it was only in 1093–4 that York gave up its claim to Stow and Lindsey (000, Regesta 341 for Lincoln).3

A writ of William I, in Old English, sheds light on the situation at Stow soon after the Conquest (W1/276; Cil. Eynsham, i. 48–50, no. 27). It is almost certainly authentic, although some minor modification cannot

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2 This is the view of Taylor & Taylor, Anglo-Saxon Architecture, ii. 584–93, which gives a detailed description of the church with extensive references to previous investigations. See also Sawyer, Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire, 246–7.

be ruled out entirely. The act contains nothing objectionable, and if the monks had needed a forgery to the same effect it would have been much easier for them to draw it up in Latin.

King William greets Thomas archbishop and Turold and Earnwig his sheriffs and all his thanes in Nottinghamshire and in Lincolnshire friendly. And I make known to you that I have granted to St Mary at Stow and to the monks Newark and Fledborough and Brampton and Well Wapentake, with sake and soke and toll and team, as fully and completely as Godiva had in the days of King Edward in all things, and as Bishop Remigius can testify rightly belong thereto. And I will that there shall come in again whatsoever has been alienated and nothing else.

The limits of date are given by the nomination of Thomas as archbishop of York in 1070, and the death of Turold before the Domesday survey of 1086, when Ivo Taillebois, by right of his wife Lucy, Turold’s heir, was holding his lands. But royal writs were given in Old English for only a few years after the Conquest and so it is likely that the writ dates from soon after Archbishop Thomas’s nomination in May 1070. There are several points worthy of note. William confirms the estates to St Mary and the monks (pan munecan), indicating that the secular institution envisaged by Leofric and Godiva when they required that the liturgy should follow St Paul’s in London had become a monastic house. As Newark and Fledborough lie in Nottinghamshire, and so in the diocese of York, Archbishop Thomas is properly included in the address. But the writ takes no heed of any York claim to Lindsey or Stow, for it is Bishop Remigius who is to determine ‘the things that . . . rightly belong thereto’. The act may perhaps be the earliest indication that moving the see from Dorchester to the northernmost part of the diocese was already under consideration. Might Remigius have first considered moving his see to Stow rather than to Lincoln?

In the Gesta regum, William of Malmesbury listed St Mary’s Stow among the foundations of Leofric and Godiva (Lefricus cum coniuge Godifa . . . monasteria multa constituit, Couentreiae, sanctae Mariae Stou, Wenelock, Leonense et nonnulla alia), but in the Gesta pontificum, writing about the bishops of Dorchester, he says that Bishop Remigius ‘built from scratch the monastery at Stow St Mary’ (cenobium

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4 Bates’s opinion was that ‘a high proportion of these Old English writs can be dated on internal evidence to the period between 1066 and 1070. Others in all probability belong to these same early years’. He counts this act as one of the latest, but allows two others from the closing years of the reign (Bates, Regesta, 48).
monachorum apud Sanctam Mariam de Stou ex nouo fecit), perhaps deliberately distinguishing between the secular church refounded in the 1050s and the Benedictine monastery (Gesta regum Anglorum II § 196, ed. Mynors & Winterbottom, i. 348–50; Gesta pontificum Anglorum IV § 177. 4, ed. Winterbottom, i. 472–3). If William is correct, the priory at Stow was founded in 1067 × c. 1070, i.e. between Remigius’s appointment as bishop of Dorchester and William I’s writ confirming lands to the church and monks. Henry of Huntingdon, on the other hand, says nothing of any priory at Stow and tells us only that Godiva, wife of Leofric, earl of Chester, ‘was famous for her great goodness, and built the abbey at Coventry . . . she also built the church of Stow under the hill of Lincoln, and many other churches’ (construxit etiam ecclesiam Stou sub promuntorio Lincolie et multas alias) (HA VI 24, ed. Greenway, 380–81).

The existence of monks at Stow is explicit in Domesday in an entry in the list of lands belonging to the bishop of Lincoln, stating that in Houghton, Robert the priest had held 1 carucate. ‘Now he has become a monk in St Mary’s Stow, with this land, but no one may have the land except with the king’s consent’ (DB, i. 345a; Lincs § 7. 55). Elsewhere in the lands of the bishop ‘St Mary Stow’ is said to have held 4 carucates in Brampton in 1065 (the wording does not make it clear if it was still in the hands of the church under Bishop Remigus) and ‘St Mary’ was holding 12 bovates in Knaith in 1086 (DB, i. 344a; § 7. 10–11). There are further entries in the claims for the West Riding of Lincolnshire. ‘St Mary’s has two parts of the soke over the forfeiture of the wapentake [of Sturton by Stow ?], and the earl [had] the third. Now the king [has it]. Likewise concerning heriot: if they had forfeited their land, St Mary’s would have had two parts and the earl the third’. Gunnewate’s and Stangrim’s lands had been forfeit in this way. St Mary’s and the earl had the same rights in the soke belonging to [Gate] Burton, Broughton, and in Well wapentake (DB, i. 376b; § CW 9–11). ‘The North Riding, and all the county, testifies that the land of Ulf of Ormsby, that is 4½ carucates of land, was sold to St Mary Stow in the time of King Edward, and belonged to it on the day he died, and later on Bishop Remigius was in possession of it’ (DB, i. 376a; § CN 27). Stow itself, called ‘Sanctae Mariae Stou’, heads the lands of Bishop Remigius, who held four carucates, with ‘a church and a priest, three smithies’ (DB, i. 344a; § 7. 1). Several other tenants-in-chief had smaller holdings in Stow. The

5 The Knaith entry follows immediately after that for Brampton, so it is clear that ‘St Mary’ means St Mary Stow and not Lincoln cathedral.
church of Stow is not mentioned in Domesday in connection with the Nottinghamshire estates of Newark (7 carucates) and Fledborough (1 carucate), which were said to be held by Countess Godiva in 1065 and by Bishop Remigius in 1086 (DB, i. 283d, 284a; Notts §§ 6. 1, 13).

The near-invisibility of the monastery in 1086 presumably reflects its status as a priory under the control of the bishop of Lincoln. The church with its priest at Stow was probably the church serving the parish, rather than the monks’ church. There may perhaps have been some arrangement between the monks and the parish priest for the shared use of the substantial church.

Domesday contains contradictory evidence for the status of Eynsham in 1086. Only the entry for the borough of Oxford speaks explicitly of an abbot, though the Gloucestershire folios list ‘the church of Eynsham’ among other institutions we know to have been abbeys at that date. In 1086 the abbot of Eynsham (abb’ de Eglesham) had a church in Oxford, and 13 dwellings, 7 of which were derelict (DB, i. 154a; Oxon § B. 9). The ‘church of Eynsham’ held Mickelton as a manor of fourteen hides in 1086 and had held it in 1065 (DB, i. 166b; Glos § 18. 1). But it was ‘the monk Columbanus’ who held of the bishop of Lincoln in Eynsham itself (15½ hides), Shifford (3 hides), and Little Rollright (5 hides) (DB, i. 155b; Oxon § 6. 6–8). Yarnton (Hardintone) was held by Roger d’Ivry of the bishop, but was said to be ‘de ecclesia Eglesham’ (DB, i. 155c; Oxon § 6. 14). Other estates confirmed to the monastery by Æthelred’s charter of 1005 were no longer held by the abbey and do not appear among the lands of Bishop Remigius. If the church at Eynsham still had abbatial status, why did the core estates, including Eynsham itself, appear as lands of the bishop? And if it did not, why was it accorded that status in Oxford and Gloucestershire? A possible explanation may be that by 1086 it had been determined there would be no abbot at Eynsham and that its endowment would be given to the foundation at Stow, but that this information had not reached those preparing the Domesday returns for Oxford and for Gloucestershire. The lands were perhaps left temporarily in the hands of Columbanus, who may have been a monk at Eynsham.

The events after Remigius’s death in 1092 are described by William of Malmesbury. Remigius’s successor as bishop, Robert Bloet... treated all monastic life with contumely and ordered the monks of Stow to be uprooted and placed at Eynsham... he gave the excuse that his interests
were being harmed by the monks who were his neighbours. If God thus granted the monks of Eynsham a fine addition to their numbers, it was no thanks to Robert, who used to boast that he was doing them a great service if he allowed them even to stay alive . . .

William then repeats gossip from the time when Bishop Robert ‘sent the monks packing from Stow’, relating how ‘the blessed Mother of our Lord’ had appeared to one of the monks in his sleep, ‘uttering fearful threats against him [Bloet]’ (Gesta pontificum Anglorum IV §§ 177. 6–7, 177. 7 β 1–2, ed. Winterbottom, i. 474–7). Henry of Huntingdon must surely have known of Bishop Robert’s actions, but he mentions Eynsham only as one of the fortified towns captured by Cuthwulf in the sixth century, following the Anglo-Saxon chronicle (HA II 23, ed. Greenway, 106–7; ASChr s. a. 571).

William’s account of Bishop Robert’s poor treatment of the monks fits well with the three apparently authentic acts printed below. Remarkably, the king appears to be taking the abbot’s side against the bishop, one of his closest advisors. 000, Regesta 350 shows that the bishop had come to an agreement with Abbot Columbanus whereby the lands held by the monastery at Stow were to be exchanged for others, but he was reluctant to keep to it. 000, Regesta 334, ordering the men of Stow abbey to be obedient to their lord Abbot Columbanus, suggests that the bishop was attempting to disseise the abbey. 000, Regesta 465, commanding the return of the men of the abbey of Eynsham, may indicate that the bishop had unlawfully removed those that had lived on the abbey’s estates.

Having assessed the apparently authentic material, we can now turn to the less convincing documents. The earliest of these fabrications by apparent date, Countess Godiva’s deed, asking the pope to confirm her gift of Newark, Fledborough, Brampton, and Marton in Well Wapentake to Stow, has already been described. Next in apparent date comes an act in the name of King William (W1/277; Ctl. Eynsham, i. 32, no. 3; Regesta 266), which confirms . . . the gift that Earl Leofric and Godiva his wife gave to the church of St Mary Stow, namely Newark and Fledborough and Well wapentake with their belongings. Further I grant to the foresaid church, at the urging of Bishop

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6 Precise details of the exchange are included in Henry I’s diploma for Eynsham, H1/000, Regesta 928.
Remigius, Eynsham church with the lands that it now holds, on this condition, that the abbot there, who shall wisely manage the affairs of the church, shall be appointed by my counsel. And the abbey shall remain in my lordship as others in England. And so that nobody shall have occasion for dispute with the abbey, I grant to the bishops of Lincoln, in compensation for the altar of Stow, and four carucates of land that belong to the bishopric, the good estate of Sleaford. And this by counsel and testimony of Archbishop Lanfranc.

The act has a suspicious address to ‘the bishops and all his sworn-men throughout England’, and the list of lands is unusually precise, particularly the explanation of the gift of Sleaford to the bishops of Lincoln as compensation for property belonging to the bishopric. The estates correspond almost exactly to those in the other forgeries and the document fits neatly into the campaign of falsification. The act was assigned to William I by Salter, followed by Bates, on the basis that William II’s (fabricated or inflated) diploma for Lincoln dated 1090 says that the gift of Sleaford was made by his father. It is indeed likely that the forger intended it for an act of William I, but the indications of date imply only 1086 × 1089. Another forgery, 000, *Regesta* 335 below, is addressed to Archbishop Thomas and the sheriffs Turold and Earnwig. This act gives the abbey at Stow to Abbot Columbanus, ‘just as I granted it to Bishop Remigius as his charter witnesses’. It too has conflicting indications of date, though again the evidence of William II’s 1090 diploma for Lincoln suggests that it was intended for William I.

The 1090 Lincoln diploma itself (000, *Regesta* 328) has much on Stow and Eynsham, and appears to have been forged or at least inflated to assist Abbot Columbanus. Among its extensive provisions, it grants to Bishop Remigius ‘as my father granted’ the right to appoint the abbot of

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7 The institution at Stow is called an abbey, implying a date after Domesday, and so the apparent date lies between 1086 and Lanfranc’s death in 1089. Davis commented ‘? spurious . . . it is difficult to resist the conclusion that this charter is a forgery’, apparently on the grounds of its incompatibilty with Domesday, though the exact reasons for his conclusion are unclear. Bates, however, wrote that ‘its diplomatic form is certainly somewhat unusual, but is not without parallel’, and drew attention to similarities with the ‘incontestably authentic original’ by which William I transferred the see from Dorchester to Lincoln. The Lincoln document is here reassessed as a probable forgery, drawn up perhaps in 1092 × 1094 (W1/177; its authenticity is discussed in the Lincoln headnote). There are indeed similarities to that document, but these merely indicate its use as a guide by the forger. Among the similarities is the witness of the obscure ‘E. sheriff’ to both documents. The Stow act, W1/277, also has Robert d’Oilly as witness: an easy choice for an Oxfordshire forger, for Robert must have been among the best know laymen of William I’s reign in that county.
Stow ‘for it is an episcopal manor’. It also confirms to the abbey specified estates given by Leofric and Godiva, as well as the church of Eynsham, also with specified estates, again ‘as my father granted’. The abbey was to remain always ‘in the lordship (in dominio) of the bishop’, who was to divide its lands between the cathedral and the abbey as he saw fit.

Finally we come to Bishop Remigius’s charter founding the abbey at Stow, confirming its estates including Eynsham and its possessions, and appointing Columbanus as abbot (Ctl. Eynsham, i. 32–5, no. 5; EEA 1 Lincoln 1067–1185, 3–4, no. 3; translation at Gordon, Eynsham Abbey, 71–4). This very long document, after a pious preamble, states that Remigius had decided ‘to re-establish the church of the holy Mother of God, the ever-virgin Mary, in a place commonly called Stow. Through lack of concern, on the part of those in charge, this church has lain deserted, for a very considerable space of time’. With the consent of King William and of all the bishops and abbots and other magnates (ceterorumque optimatum), he appointed Columbanus as abbot, and granted the lands ‘once conferred upon it by the most noble Earl Leofric, and by his most devout wife Godiva, namely Brampton and two-thirds of Well wapentake, together with all that belongs to them, Newark also and Fledborough similarly’. The bishop goes on to make a further gift, of ‘whatever rights have until this time belonged to the bishop, at the very centre of the said episcopal estate, in which the said church of Stow is situate, namely, the altar-offerings at that church and four carucates of land there’. The gifts were for the restoration of the church and for the use of the brethren. The clauses that follow suspiciously preempt Robert Bloet’s actions:

And lest my successors, the days of my life being ended, do despite to my soul, and assert that I have carelessly diminished the see or in any wise despoiled them of what is theirs I have secured another estate for the see, in permanent exchange for the above-mentioned payments now taken away from it. It is Sleaford, a particularly delightful manor, together with all that properly belongs to it. Its acquisition involved me in immense trouble. It has proved to be a convenient property, not to say essential, and doubtless it will be the same for those who at Christ’s bidding succeed me. This I now give to the see, both for myself and for those who come after me. It is a complete exchange and recompense, now established firmly and inviolably.

Furthermore I also add to the same church of the most glorious Mother of God at Stow and to the monks of its household, yet another outstanding benefaction. It is the church of Eynsham, together with those lands in which it
has stood from of old and the other estates which go with it, namely, Shifford and Little Rollright, as also Yarnton and Mickleton, and a certain little church of Saint Ebbe, situate in the city of Oxford, with its own small properties, gifts of the faithful; also two mills, long set beside the water-courses of the same city, together with all that rightly appertains to them . . . I do here and now bestow upon this same church of the most holy Virgin such perpetual freedom, that no mortal man, be he never so swollen and drunk with pride, may exercise any dominion over it, saving only the bishop of Lincoln, holder of this our see . . .

An anathema follows on anyone who moved against the abbey ‘unless perchance he has repented and made adequate amends to God and to holy church, which he has defrauded and injured’. The document ends with a detailed dating clause, very similar in style to the dating clause of William II’s fabricated diploma for Lincoln. As there is so little comparable material the document is difficult to assess for authenticity, but it too is surely condemned by its detailed description of the estates given to the abbey, and in particular the reference to Sleaford as given to the bishopric in compensation for the manor of Stow and its entitlement to altar-dues, preempting the actions of Robert Bloet inferred from 000, Regesta 350 below.

Three disputes that may have given rise to forgery can be identified. The first of these was the claim of the archbishop of York to ecclesiastical jurisdiction over Lindsey, including Stow as well as Lincoln itself, settled finally only in 1092–3. Not long afterwards, the terms of the monks’ removal from Stow were hotly disputed between Abbot Columbanus and Robert Bloet, bishop of Lincoln, as can be inferred from the acts printed below. Finally there was the Crown’s attempt to gain the advowson of Eynsham in 1195–7. This is known only from Adam of Eynsham’s account in his life of Bishop Hugh of Avalon (Adam of Eynsham, Magna uita sancti Hugonis VIII, ed. Douie, ii. 39–41).

Certain evil persons made a determined attack on the right of patronage over Eynsham exercised continually and without challenge by the church of Lincoln

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8 (Remigius for Eynsham) . . . anno ab incarnatione Cristi millesimo LXXXXI indictione XIII, anno IIII regni inclitissimi principis Anglorum Willelmi secundi, pontificatus autem Remigii Lindocolinensis episcopi anno XXIII. (William II for Lincoln) . . . anno ab incarnatione eiusdem domini M° LXXXX° indictione XIII. Ego W(illelmus) Anglorum rex tertio regni mei relabente anno . . .
for a hundred years or more, since the arrival of the Normans and their conquest of England. Blessed bishop Remigius . . . had refounded the ruined abbey, from which the monks had fled out of fear of the enemy. The mighty conqueror William had in virtue of his royal authority confirmed his possession of it, on terms which excluded the lordship of any clerk or layman except the bishop and his successors.

This is hard to reconcile with the surviving documents, whether authentic or not, which contain nothing to support the statement that Eynsham was refounded in the Conqueror’s reign by Remigius. Adam goes on to tell us that in Hugh’s tenth year as bishop (1195–6), Godfrey, the abbot of Eynsham, died.

The king was at that time abroad fighting against the French king, and those who governed England for him did their best to deprive the bishop of his custody of the vacant abbey and of his right to appoint the abbot . . . for two and a half years, sparing neither labour nor money . . . [Bishop Hugh fought] to preserve the freedom and canonical status of the aforesaid monastery . . . at length with God’s assistance he won a notable victory. Twenty-four trustworthy recognitors, half of whom were clerks and half laymen, testified on oath to the rights of his predecessors over the monastery, and its patronage was adjudged to him in the king’s court. Hence the right of custody during vacancies was restored to him and his right of appointing the abbot was completely established.

A number of themes emerge from the five false acts. They show that the estates of Newark, Fledborough, Brampton and Marton in Well Wapentake had originally been given by Godiva, or Leofric and Godiva, to the church of Stow, and that William I and William II had confirmed the gift. They also show that the bishopric had been adequately compensated for the loss of the Stow estate and altar-dues by the gift of Sleaford, and that Eynsham and its estates had been given to Stow abbey by Remigius, with the king’s approval. The need for these protections must have arisen from Bishop Robert’s expulsion of the monks from Stow, and we may see Abbot Columbanus as the driving force behind their production. With the help of the forgeries, he was able to gain in exchange for the properties the substantial compensation detailed in Henry I’s diploma. An area where there is disagreement between the

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9 The list varies in different documents. Brampton is sometimes omitted, and Marton in Well wapentake is replaced by Well wapentake, or two-thirds of Well wapentake. A useful summary, in translation, is at Gordon, *Eynsham Abbey*, 174.
forgeries is in the patronage of the abbey. Only in W1/277 is it stated
that the abbey should remain in the king’s lordship as did the others in
England. The right to appoint the abbot is there dealt with somewhat
ambiguously: he was to be appointed ‘by the king’s counsel’, and the
right of the bishop is not mentioned. This may have been advantageous
to Columbanus in his dispute with Bloet. William II’s diploma for
Lincoln and Remigius’s act founding Stow, though, are clear and
unequivocal: the right of appointment belonged to the bishop. Some
forgeries may have reached the form recorded in the cartulary in two
stages: first to advance Columbanus’s case in the late eleventh century,
and second to assist the bishop in his dispute with the king a century
later.

We conclude that Stow church became a Benedictine priory soon after
the Conquest. Whether it ever achieved the status of abbey is uncertain:
this may have been a historical invention to help Columbanus in his
struggle with the bishop. The monastery was closed down in the reign of
William II, when Bishop Robert sent its monks to Eynsham. What the
Stow monks found there is also uncertain. William of Malmesbury, who
was in a good position to know, said they provided the monks of
Eynsham with ‘a fine addition to their numbers’. Henry I’s diploma and
Adam of Eynsham’s account, however, agree that Eynsham abbey did
not continue after the Conquest and had been refounded; Adam says that
it was Remigius who refounded it. Being able to prove a post-Conquest
foundation may have been critical to the bishop’s claim to the advowson,
so we must view this evidence with some suspicion.

H. E. Salter, Cartulary of the Abbey of Eynsham, OHS 49, 51 (1907–9); E. Gordon,
Eynsham Abbey (Chichester 1990); Aelfric’s abbey: excavations at Eynsham Abbey,
the Eynsham cartulary and its antiquarian copies, and other documentary sources for
Eynsham, see the HI headnote.

000 Writ commanding the men of the abbey of Stow to obey
Abbot Columbanus as they had obeyed Bishop
Remigius. May 1092 × 1100

CARTULARY COPY: Oxford, Christ Church, Chapter Library, MS vi. a. 2 (s. xii/xiii)
(Eynsham cartulary), fol. xi’ (no. iii, ‘Item carta regis Willielmi’) [B].
Willelmus rex Angl<orum>a hominibus abbatie de la Stou salutem. Precipio uobis omnibus ut ita sitis obedientes domino uestro Columbano abbatii sicut fuistis Remigio episcopo in omnibus rebus. T(este) Ric(ardo) de Curci.

a Anglie B

William king of the English to the men of the abbey of Stow greeting. I command you all to be obedient to your Abbot Columbanus in all things as you were to Bishop Remigius. Witness Richard de Courcy.

DATE: Almost certainly after the death of Bishop Remigius. It would surely not have been needed during the lifetime of the bishop, who is said to have appointed the abbot, but rather belongs to the time of the dispute between Columbanus and Bishop Robert.

ADDRESS: To the men of the abbey of Stow.

WITNESS: Richard de Courcy witnessed two other acts of William II: 000, Regesta 352 for Chichester, 1086 × 1094, and 000, Regesta 349, a Durham forgery. He witnessed more frequently for William I.

PLACE: No place-date.

CONTEXT: This appears to be the only authentic document referring to an abbey at Stow. The most likely circumstances for the production of this writ are those of Bishop Robert’s ejection of the monks from Stow, the date and details of which are uncertain. As is discussed in the Headnote, William II’s dubious diploma for Lincoln cathedral and Bishop Remigius’s doubtful foundation charter for the abbey suggest that Bishop Robert had tried to regain the manor of Stow on the grounds that his predecessor had no right to alienate this part of the episcopal estate. He also wanted the abbey’s other estates at Newark and elsewhere, and he may well have been pressurising the abbey’s tenants to accept him as their overlord rather than the abbot.

Writs ordering tenants to be obedient to their lord are not common, but there are other examples. William II commands, in an ‘undoubtedly authentic’ original for Canterbury Christ Church, ‘ut homines eiusdem ecclesie predictis monachis subditi sint et subiecti et in omnibus obedientes’ (000, Regesta 418; Bishop and Chaplais, no. 6). Henry I ordered the barons of Abingdon abbey to be obedient to Abbot Faritius (000, Regesta 725).
AUTHENTICITY: This writ can only have been effective between Remigius’s death and the settlement of Bishop Robert’s dispute with Columbanus. It is surely unlikely that Columbanus would have dared to forge an executive writ of this type, especially in view of Robert Bloet’s former career as chancellor, and his continuing close relationship with William II.

000 Writ commanding the bishop of Lincoln to respect Abbot Columbanus and to seise him in the exchange made for lands at Stow. March 1094 × September 1099

CARTULARY COPY: Oxford, Christ Church Chapter Library, MS. vi. a. 2 (s. xii/xiii) (Eynsham Cartulary), fol. xii° (no. vi, ‘De excambio sancte Marie de Stowe’) [B].
ANTIQUARIAN TRANSCRIPTS: BL MS Cotton Vespasian B. xv fols. 7–18 (s. xvi²), fol. 8v (‘De excambio sancte Marie de Stowe’) [from B]; BL Cotton Claudia A. viii (s. xvi²), fol. 129r (now fol. 133r) [from B]; Bodl. MS Dodsworth 78, fol. 15v [from Claudia A. viii]; Bodl. MS Dodsworth 55, fol. 13r [from Dugdale’s notes of 1644]; Bodl. MS Dugdale 21, fol. 5r [fair copy of Dugdale’s notes of 1644, taken from B].
PRINTED: Dugdale, i. 265a [via Dugdale’s notes of 1644], repr. Monasticon, iii. 15 (no. viii); PL 149. 1354 (no. xi) [from Dugdale]; Ctl. Eynsham, i. 35 (no. 6) [from B]; Gordon, Eynsham Abbey, 77 (in English) [from Ctl. Eynsham].
CALENDAR: Regesta 350.


William king of the English to R(obert) bishop of Lincoln greeting. I command that you shall hold Abbot Columbanus peaceably and honourably, and you shall cause him to have fully his exchange for all the lands that he used to hold at Stow on such terms that there shall be nothing lacking but that he shall have the same worth as he used to have there. And see that I hear no further complaint on the matter, since I have not consented to the change of location on any other terms. Witness William the chancellor. At Eu.

DATE: After Robert Bloet was elected bishop, probably in Lent 1093, and William was appointed chancellor not long afterwards; before the king’s death. The place date
restricts dating to four periods when the king was in Normandy, 19 March 1094–January 1095; September 1096–early 1097; 11 November 1097–Easter 1099; July–September 1099. The writ was dated to 1094 by Salter (Ctl. Eynsham, i. 35; VCH Oxon, ii. 65), on the basis of ASChr, which records the king at Eu in that year. The king may have been at Eu in later years.

ADDRESS: Robert Bloet, bishop of Lincoln.


PLACE: Eu.

CONTEXT: This writ appears to be concerned with enforcing an agreement between the bishop and Abbot Columbanus concerning the monks removal from Stow to Eynsham. Details of the exchange are given by Henry I’s diploma for Eynsham (H1/000, Regesta 928, §§ 7–16). The monks surrendered their holdings in Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire, and received in return tithes and lands in Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire. The command that the bishop shall hold the abbot peacefully and honourably requires explanation. The verb could be used with reference to a tenant (e.g. ‘istos liberos homines addidit Radulfus comes huic manerio . . . et tenebat eos quando forisfecit’, DB, ii. 133b; Essex § 1. 197). In this case the sense is that the bishop is to conduct himself peacefully towards his tenant Columbanus. The verb could also mean to foster or maintain a person.

AUTHENTICITY: If this were a fabrication, greater detail of what the abbot wanted as his fair exchange might be expected. It is unlikely that Columbanus would have forged an executive writ of this type, intended for use with immediate effect to bring a dispute to an end.

000 Writ commanding that the men of the abbey of Eynsham be returned with their chattels from wherever they are found, September 1093 × August 1100

CARTULARY COPY: Oxford, Christ Church Chapter Library, MS. vi. a. 2 (s. xii/xiii) (Eynsham Cartulary), fol. xvii (no. xxviii. ‘Item alia’) [B].
ANTIQUARIAN COPY: BL MS Cotton Claudius A. viii (s. xvi), fol. 130r (now fol. 134r) (lacks tenor) [from B].
PRINTED: Ctl. Eynsham, i, 50–51 (no. 28) [from B]; Gordon, Eynsham Abbey, 77 (in English) [from Ctl. Eynsham].
CALENDAR: Regesta 465.

Willelmus rex Angl(orum) omnibus uicecomitibus suis et ministris Anglie salutem. Precipio uobis ut iustè et sine dilatione habere faciatis abbatie de Egnesday et abbatii eius homines suos omnes cum pecuniis eorum ubicunque eos inuenire poterint homines eiusdem abbatie. Et defendo super X libras forisfacture ne aliquis eos iniuste detineat. Quia uolo
ut abbas homines suos et abbatiam suam cum magno honore teneat. T(este) Willelmo cancellario. Apud Lega(m).

William king of the English to all his sheriffs and officials of England greeting. I command you that you shall justly and without delay cause the abbey of Eynsham and its abbot to have all his men with their chattels wherever they shall be able to find them (as) men of the abbey. And I forbid upon £10 of forfeit that anyone shall unjustly detain them. For I will that the abbot shall hold his men and his abbey with great honour. Witness William the chancellor. At Lega.

DATE: After William Giffard became chancellor, not before 25 September 1093; before the king’s death.
ADDRESS: To all the king’s sheriffs and officials of England.
PLACE: The place-name leigh is common, and this occurrence of it has not been identified.
CONTEXT: For writs of naifty, i.e. writs ordering the return of peasants to their lords, see Van Caenegem, *Royal Writs*, 336–44, 467–77. They appear from the time of William II onwards; 000, *Regesta* 399 for Eudo dapifer and 000, *Regesta* 419 for Ramsey provide other early examples. The troubles associated with the monks’ ejection from Stow and their reestablishment at Eynsham suggest that this writ should be viewed in association with 000, *Regesta* 350. The bishop may have encouraged his tenants to leave the lands he had assigned to the abbey and bring their chattels to manors still under episcopal control.
AUTHENTICITY: It is hard to imagine that an executive writ of this type, conferring no additional rights, would be forged. It serves no purpose at a later date, when an authentic and up-to-date version could have been obtained from the king if it were needed.

000† Purported writ-charter granting to Columbanus the abbey of St Mary at Stow

CARTULARY COPY: Oxford, Christ Church Chapter Library, MS. vi. a. 2 (s. xii/xiii) (Eynsham Cartulary), fol. xvii” (no. xxvi, ‘Carta regis Willelmi de Stowe’) [B].
ANTIQUARIAN TRANSCRIPTS: BL MS Cotton Vespasian B. xv (s. xvi), fol. 8v [from B]; Bodl. MS Dugdale 21, fol. 6r [fair copy of Dugdale’s notes of 1644, taken from B]; Bodl. MS Dodsworth 55, fol. 13r [from Dugdale’s notes of 1644].
PRINTED: Stevens, *Monasticon Additions*, ii, Appendix, 100a (no. xciii. c) [from Cotton], repr. *Monasticon*, iii. 20a (no. xxxi); *Ct. Eynsham*, i. 48 (no. 26) [from B]; Gordon, *Eynsham Abbey*, 71 (in English) [from *Ct. Eynsham*].
CALENDAR: *Regesta* 335.

Willelmus rex Anglorum a T(home) archiepiscopo et Turoldo et Earnwio uicecomiti [sic] et omnibus baronibus suis
de Snothinghamsire et Lincolensire francigenis et anglis salutem. Sciatis me concessisse abbati Columbano abbatiam de sancte Marie Stou sicut ego illam episcopo Remigio concessi ut carta sua testificatur. T(este) Rob(erto) filio Haymonis.

* Anglie B

William king of the English to Archbishop Thomas and the sheriffs Thorold and Earnwig and all his barons of Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire French and English greeting. Know that I have granted to Abbot Columbanus the abbey of St Mary Stow just as I granted it to Bishop Remigius as his charter witnesses. Witness Robert son of Hamo.

DATE: Turolf was dead in 1086, but the act in the name of Remigius granting Stow to Columbanus, which this appears to confirm, is dated 1091. Salter dated the present act to 1091–2; the editors of Regesta accepted Salter’s date.

ADDRESS: The address is an almost exact translation of the address in William I’s Old English writ stating that he had granted Newark, Fledborough, Brampton and Well to Stow, as Godiva had given them (W1/276). Turolf was no longer sheriff when Domesday was compiled in 1086; his lands were then in Ivo Taillebois’s hands, by right of his wife Lucy, Turolf’s heir.


PLACE: No place-date.

CONTEXT: This confirmation apparently relates to Remigius’s 1091 grant of Stow to Columbanus as abbot, and retrospectively authorises his actions. This act is one of the four forgeries apparently confected by Abbot Columbanus during his dispute with RobertBloet. The meaning of ‘ut carta sua testificatur’ is obscure. Does it refer to William’s grant of the abbey of Stow to Remigius, or Remigius’s grant to Columbanus? AUTHENTICITY: Chronological and diplomatic difficulties combine to mark this act as false. The address is identical to that of William I’s Old English act for Stow, but is incompatible with the business of the act. Turolf was dead at the Domesday Survey, and as there is no sign in the Survey that Stow had achieved the status of an abbey, there are conflicting indications of date. The word testificatur does not otherwise appear in Anglo-Norman royal charters. The phrase ‘ut carta sua testificatur’ reflects ‘sicuct carta sua testatur’, used in authentic acts. Usually the meaning of the phrase is clear, but here it is ambiguous. The circumstances suggest the act was fabricated to add weight to Remigius’s act giving Columbanus the abbacy of Stow, by showing that the king had approved of Remigius’s actions, and so we may presume that Remigius’s act for Columbanus is meant.