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Questions of Identity

Rewriting Anglo-Saxon Female Saints in Post-Conquest England c.1066-c.1500

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and History,
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Abstract

Questions of Identity: Rewriting Anglo-Saxon Female Saints in Post-Conquest England, c.1066-c.1500.

The focus of this thesis is the production of identity arising from the writing and re-writing of the *vitae* of the Anglo-Saxon female patron saints of certain nunneries founded before the Norman Conquest in 1066, namely Wilton, Nunnaminster, Romsey and Barking. The *vitae* studied date from the eleventh century, shortly after the Conquest, through to the sixteenth century, just before the English Reformation.

The re-writing of the *vita* of a patron saint, commissioned by the community who depends on her, is necessarily involved in the formation and reformation of identity of that community. However, the writers of these *vitae*, where they can be identified, often come from outside the community and, therefore, while trying to fulfil their brief, also bring their own agenda to their texts. In examining the uses and creations of identity in these texts, three layers are focused on: the identity of the saint, as the re-writings of her life alter her personality; the identity of the community around the saint which, as reflected in the changing of the *vita*, develops over the period in question; and the identity of the Englishness, as it develops after the Conquest to include the Normans.

The function of patron saints' *vitae* in the creation and fostering of communal identity has previously been examined with relation to a single location or a single saint. This study draws on a wider range of places and saints in order to form a clearer idea of how saints were viewed in medieval England. The focus on local saints, on Anglo-Saxon saints, allows one to see how historical figures become sources of power, and how that power is utilised in the development of notions of identity. This, in turn, will provide a basis for future study of individual and groups of saints, in assessing how the use of the various identities changed over time, and in different locations. This study also serves to illustrate ways in which women's history can be recovered, and the involvement of women in the development of English identity.

To
Stephanie Hollis
and
Michael Wright

Teachers, mentors, friends.

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I am very grateful to Michael Wright for help with transcription and Latin translation, and discussions on a huge range of topics. Also to Keith Montgomery, for checking the Middle English transcriptions and discussing dialect and other linguistic features.

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Notes

On Proper Names

Anglo-Saxon names have been altered and abused by Latin and Anglo-Norman authors, with the result that most names have a wide variety of spellings. In attempting to regulate them, I follow Barbara Yorke, Janet Fairweather and Michael Winterbottom's works, in order to present the names in an easily recognisable form that is as close to the original Anglo-Saxon as possible. For example, I spell the name of Ely's primary saint as Æthelthryth, rather than Æðelþryð (most correct), Etheldrede (most common), Audrey (most Anglo-Norman), or any of the other forms used in the source texts.

However, where I am quoting directly from either a primary source, or a secondary study, I use the form employed by the editor or author of the work I am quoting. For example, Eadburh sometimes appears as Edburga, or Eadburg; Wulfhild may show up as Wulfilda, Æthelburh as Ethelburga, and Ælflæd as Elffled.

On Translations of Latin

Many of the texts discussed here were written originally in Latin. Where published translations exist, such as the Oxford series of parallel Latin/English texts, I have quoted these translations in my thesis, and only quoted the Latin where it is appropriate. The translations thus used are: *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); 'Goscelin's Legend of Edith', trans. by Michael J. Wright and Kathleen Loncar in *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius*, ed. by Stephanie Hollis and others, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 17-93; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); *Liber Eliensis: a history of the Isle of Ely from the seventh century to the twelfth*, trans. by Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005); William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by R. M. Thomson, R. A. B. Mynors, and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).

For texts for which there is no translation available in published form (principally Goscelin's *vitae* of the Barking saints, and Osbert's *Vita Edburge*), I give Latin quotations in the footnotes; the translations in the body of the thesis are my own, based on discussions with Michael Wright. I am very grateful to him for the time spent in translation, and also for access to the drafts of his forthcoming translations of Goscelin's *vitae* of the Barking nuns, based on Marvin L. Colker's 'Texts of Jocelyn of Canterbury Which Relate to the History of Barking Abbey', *Studia Monastica*, 7 (1965), 383-460.

On Appendices

Two texts which are important in this thesis have not yet been published, so they are included in the Appendices for reference.

Appendix A contains my transcription of the Life of Æthelthryth from the *South English Legendary* in *The Vernon Manuscript: a Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. poet. A. 1.; with an introduction by Ian Doyle*, ed. by A. I. Doyle (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987).

Appendix B contains my transcription of the Life of Edith and the Life of Audrey from the *Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*, found in Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 2604. This manuscript is currently being edited by Virginia Blanton and Veronica O'Mara. My thanks to the University of Auckland Faculty of Arts Doctoral Award for providing funding so that I could inspect the manuscript, and also to Keith Montgomery for checking my transcription.

List of Abbreviations and Short Titles

- Bede, *HE* *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).
- Huntingdon, *HA* Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
- LE* *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth*, trans. by Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005).
- Legend of Edith* 'Goscelin's *Legend of Edith*', trans. by Michael Wright and Kathleen Loncar, in *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius*, ed. by Stephanie Hollis and others, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 17-93.
- Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres* Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 2604.
- Malmesbury, *GRA* William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by R. M. Thomson, R. A. B. Mynors, M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
- Malmesbury, *GPA* William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).
- Romsey History* London, British Library, MS Lansdowne 436.

Vernon

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS English Poetry a. 1

Wilton Chronicle

S. Editha sive Chronicon Vilodunense im Wiltshire dialekt, aus ms.

Cotton. Faustina B III, ed. by Carl Horstmann (Heilbronn: Verlag von Gebr. 1883).

Introduction:

Rewriting the Nunneries' Anglo-Saxon Female Saints

Canute, a member of the royal family by adoption, gained the rule from Edmund, together with Edward's mother Emma, just as king William succeeded Edward. And so this foreign king Canute, captivated by what he had learned of the piety of holy Edith and her frequent miracles, was as devoted to her in affection and reverence as if he had been her brother Æthelred or her nephew Edmund. [...] On one occasion, returning to his ancestral kingdom of Denmark, he was hurled about by fierce storms in that wide sea. Then, seeing that he was almost being overcome by the waves, he called out with frequent cries: 'Saint Edith, help! Christ, free us by the merits of Saint Edith!' Thereupon the glorious virgin, appearing joyfully to him as he was tossed by the storm, said: 'Behold I am here for you, Edith, whom you have called upon; I have come to your aid when called; and behold, for you I have calmed this storm through Him whom the winds and the sea obey.' At these words he looked round, and behold – a marvellous sight: all the storms of winds had quietened, and after the danger great peace and joy smiled on the scene. And there he was rescued, with all his fleet, and when he returned to England and came to Wilton, he repaid God through the holy mediator Edith by giving thanks with solemn gifts, and publicized this great miracle with prolific testimony.

(Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *Legend of Edith*.)¹

Anglo-Saxon female saints rarely became well-known beyond the British Isles. However, St Edith of Wilton (c. 961-84) is able to make her presence felt in 'that wide sea' between Britain and Denmark because of the devotion King Cnut (*d.* 1035) had already shown to her. This passage from Goscelin of Saint-Bertin (c. 1040-1114) illustrates a number of issues surrounding questions of identity in saints' *vitae*. The saint acts as the conduit of God, with power over the wind and the waves. Edith's relics belong to the community of Wilton, which is therefore the seat of her cult, and so the king returns there after his miraculous rescue to give thanks and gifts, and to testify to the saint's power. The opening of the passage also indicates an association of Edith with a community beyond the nunnery. She was the half-sister of King Æthelred, the aunt of Edmund Ironside, and thus was related to Cnut by his 'adoption' into the royal family, his marriage to Emma, the widow of Æthelred the Unready (*d.* 1016). In this way, Edith gains significance for all of the English, as is further shown through her saving of the Danish king of England.

¹ Michael J. Wright and Kathleen Loncar, 'Goscelin's *Legend of Edith*', in *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius*, ed. by Stephanie Hollis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 17-93 (pp. 77-78).

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Vitae have been treated with some scepticism by historians, even in medieval times. The inclusion in them of miracles – vital to the depiction of the person as a saint – causes problems for those attempting to reach the ‘truth’ of history. However, tales of storms being calmed, or the blind healed, should not conceal from us the historical value of *vitae*. These texts preserve information about a range of subjects, many of which are not recorded in histories as they were not explicitly identified by the chroniclers as important in the development of a nation or people. Such subjects include royal endowments, Latin literacy, attitudes to women, and the progress of Norman integration into English society.

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The focus of this thesis is the production of identities – particularly the individual identities of the saints, and a broader, English identity – arising from the writing and re-writing of the *vitae* of the patron saints of certain nunneries, namely Edith of Wilton, Eadburh of Nunnaminster, Ælflæd of Romsey and Æthelburh and Wulfhild of Barking. These four houses, Wilton, Nunnaminster, Romsey and Barking, were founded before the Norman Conquest of 1066 and remained important centres of female religious activity until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536-9. Therefore, they provide a fixed point of reference for a study on the use of female saints’ *vitae* in and around women’s communities. Two other houses are also considered: in contrast to the women’s houses, most male monastic communities have dedications to male saints, but Pershore and Ely venerated female patron saints. Pershore became the home of some relics of Eadburh of Nunnaminster, while Ely remembered as its founder Æthelthryth, her sister Seaxburh, and other female relations. These two houses will provide an occasional point of contrast in this study, giving a glimpse into the role of a female saint in a male community.

Of the saints in this study, the women of Barking and Ely had pre-Conquest *vitae*, some of which were produced by their communities, such as Barking’s ‘*libellus*’ upon which Bede based his record of Æthelburh. Other pre-Conquest *vitae* were found in larger works, such as Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and were thus placed alongside *vitae* of saints

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from different parts of Anglo-Saxon England, such as Æthelthryth and other northern saints.² However, because all of the saints who are examined here lived before the Conquest, the surviving texts about them all contain elements of pre-Conquest England, and this informs the creation of their post-Conquest *vitae*.

The writing of a patron saint, commissioned by the community who depend on her,³ is necessarily involved in the formation and reformation of identity of that community.

However, the writers of these *vitae*, where they can be identified, often come from outside the community and, therefore, they bring their own agendas to their texts. In the examination of these texts, a number of questions are raised about their formation and, in turn, their effect on their audiences. The issue of identity, in its most basic usage, is an important concern in the study of many of these texts. For whom were they written? By whom were they written? Who read them? Who heard them? These are just the simple questions, but they feed into the more complex ones. How is the saint presented and represented? How much is historical, and how much is dependant on formulaic saints' Lives? How do the audiences affect the portrayal of the saint? Following the Conquest, how do we see the *vitae* engaging with ethnic identity and ethnic allegiances? What evidence can we find of women's involvement with ideas of Englishness?

In exploring the uses and creations of identities in these texts, we find a range of answers. The four nunneries enjoyed varying levels of popularity, wealth and patronage. Their saints' *vitae* were recorded by a range of people: the eleventh-century hagiographer Goscelin of St-Bertin was commissioned to record the *vitae* of Edith of Wilton and Æthelburh, Hildelith and Wulfhild of Barking, while an Englishman, Osbert of Clare, wrote the *Vita Edburge* in the twelfth century. On the other hand, the earliest surviving *vita* of Romsey Abbey's Ælfflæd is a much later work, being found in a fourteenth-century manuscript by an unknown author.

² Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); John of Tynemouth, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, ed. by Carl Horstmann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901).

³ I am using 'her' to refer to the patron saint of a community because the saints in this study are female.

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Some surviving manuscripts containing *vitae* can be directly traced to female communities, such as London, British Library, MS Lansdowne 436, which belonged, according to an inscription on the opening folio, to Romsey Abbey. The manuscript includes a 'brief (unprinted) chronicle of English history from Hengist to Egbert' along with 43 *vitae* of English saints recorded in Latin.⁴ This seems to indicate that there was a high level of learning, an accomplished reading community, at Romsey in the fourteenth century, which makes Romsey exceptional at that date. Altogether, MS Lansdowne 436 contains short hagiographic commemorations of fifteen Anglo-Saxon female saints, and includes *vitae* of both Ælffæd of Romsey and Eadburh of Nunnaminster. For other texts, the question of audience is harder to ascertain. Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 2604 contains a collection of *vitae* of mainly female saints, 11 of whom are Anglo-Saxon. Importantly for this study, the manuscript includes a *vita* of Edith of Wilton, and *vitae* of the Ely ladies, Æthelthryth and her sisters. It is written in Middle English prose and the Anglo-Saxon *vitae* are a loose translation of the *Nova Legenda Angliæ*. Thus far the manuscript has not been traced to a religious community, though the preponderance of female lives points to a female audience. Virginia Blanton suggests that it was 'intended for devotional use in a Benedictine or Austin house for women', probably in East Anglia.⁵

The main focus of this study is on the texts which are connected to the Anglo-Saxon female saints of Romsey, Nunnaminster, Wilton and Barking. Therefore, the immediate audience is expected to be the community in which the saint was envisioned as having lived, and in which she continued to work, even after her death. As Lesley Johnson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne remark, '[t]he question of who hears a text and the contexts and transformations of its reception remain vital concerns in our literary mappings.'⁶ The texts which will be analysed here demonstrate this, as the transformations of many of the *vitae* from one language to another, or from one location to another, affect the audience, both intended and

⁴ David Bell, *What Nuns Read* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995), p. 161.

⁵ Virginia Blanton, 'Literary Production and Nunneries in East Anglia: the Legendary of CUL Add. MS 2604', <http://www.fordham.edu/myst/barkingabbey/blantonpaper.html> [accessed 19 November 2009].

⁶ Lesley Johnson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'National, World and Women's History: Writers and Readers of English in Post-Conquest England', in *Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 92-121 (p. 121).

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incidental. This in turn affects how the saint is recorded and remembered in these different works.

Goscelin's *Legend of Edith* (c. 1080), for example, was based on reports from the older nuns, recalling what they had been told by their seniors, who had been alive during Edith's time.⁷ In this way, there is a sense of the community writing its own history, even though it is mediated through the elaborate Latin of a professional hagiographer. A later narrative, the *Wilton Chronicle* (c. 1420), was also written with the community in mind, as there are direct references to the nuns as audience.⁸ However, being in English, it was also easily available to a lay audience, and the tone of parts of the text appears to be catering for an audience familiar with romances.

Osbert of Clare's *Vita Edburge* (early twelfth century) is also concerned with the community within which Eadburh lived.⁹ The surviving manuscript appears to have belonged to Pershore, the male community which later acquired some of her relics. However, most of the text is taken up with the history and experiences of Nunnaminster, the Danish depredations on the female house, and the abbesses who worked to promote Eadburh to the surrounding communities. Osbert (d. 1158) was also an accomplished hagiographer, but unlike Goscelin, he was a native of England, and was proud of this fact. Writing in Latin, he repeatedly referred to English names, places and traditions, and thus consciously presented England as a discrete entity, a territory with a language and a people.

Identities

In broad, general terms, identities are the building-blocks for identification, for describing and understanding a subject in relation to previously-known types or templates. Identities pre-exist the process of identification, and are useful as a means by which something can be described, a short-hand to be used in order to convey rapidly and simply a rather complex

⁷ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 24.

⁸ *S. Editha sive Chronicon Vilonunense in Wiltshire dialect, aus ms. Cotton. Faustina B III*, ed. by Carl Horstmann (Heilbronn: Gebr. Henninger, 1883), ll. 682-9, 697.

⁹ Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: a Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Fourth Series, 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 255-308. On dating the work, see Ridyard, pp. 16-37, 255.

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idea, without having to reinvent a language by which to communicate the concept. Thus, identities are used to align the subject with templates created from previously-understood ideas. At the same time, 'an identity is an attempt, amongst other things, to create an enduring cohesive narrative',¹⁰ a Foucauldian 'object of knowledge',¹¹ and so an identity is told and retold as outside influences alter both themselves and the identity.

Identity, therefore, is a fluid term, with no simple agreed meaning across a range of disciplines, a term under constant discussion.¹² The *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* provides two different uses of the term: one focuses on an individual, attempting to describe something that is 'perpetually in flux, pursuing an illusion of wholeness and selfhood that is ultimately unattainable', while the other use is to do with belonging to a particular group, as defined by shared characteristics.¹³

The two uses of the term 'identity' supplied by the *Columbia Dictionary* are particularly appropriate to this study as they serve to tie together the two parts of the project. The first part focuses on individual saints, and how they are depicted as distinct individuals, while the second part looks at a broader picture of how the *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon female saints contribute to the development of an English identity. However, as Caroline Walker Bynum has pointed out, 'the question of change is [...] the other side of the question of identity'.¹⁴ Both the identity of the saint and the identity of the group are constantly under pressure from new ideas, and therefore they change to adapt to these pressures. Thus, by looking at a range of texts, from those written shortly after the Norman Conquest to those written in the late fifteenth century, this study considers the impact of different cultural situations on the formation of identity.

¹⁰ Tracy McIntosh, 'Maori Identities: Fixed, Fluid, Forced' in *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations*, ed. by James H. Liu and others (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005), pp. 38-51, p. 38

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 49.

¹² See, for example, Caroline Walker Bynum's discussion on the variety of concepts surrounding the term, and in particular the mutability of 'identity', in *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), pp. 163-66.

¹³ *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. by Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 148.

¹⁴ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 19.

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In writings about Anglo-Saxon female saints, identities are being imposed by outside forces. The saint herself is not 'pursuing an illusion of wholeness and selfhood', but rather the hagiographer is attempting to present a person as a particular type – a holy woman – while the commissioning community requires that person to be represented as they remember her, both through oral memories and physical relics. At the same time, the intended audience affects both what is included in the hagiography, and how it is displayed in the text. Adding a further complication to the identity of the saint is the reading and examining of her *vitae* in a twenty-first century setting, in an effort to discover what post-Conquest writers thought about women, saints, communities and audiences.

Thus, in discussing the identities of Anglo-Saxon female saints in this study, there are multiple foci. The first point of interest is an attempt to locate the saints in their own places, in time and space: the study of the historical people. Who were the women who became saints? Who were the saints who continued to be remembered after the Conquest? Whom were they related to? Whom did they interact with? The second point of interest is that of the people doing the remembering: the communities and the hagiographers. These, too, come under scrutiny in the attempt to discover how the writers collated and presented their information for different audiences, both those who had commissioned the *vitae* and those who the hagiographers hoped to interest in their work. Finally, the audiences for these *vitae* are briefly examined to find out how they influenced the composition of the texts, and thus the texts' representations of the identities of the saints.

In contrast to the individual identities of the saints, the second half of this thesis looks at the contributions which Anglo-Saxon female saints' *vitae* made to the development of a group identity, in particular an English identity. Previous studies on Anglo-Saxon saints and the emergence or re-emergence of a sense of Englishness after the Norman Conquest have all been focused on male saints. This current study uses similar approaches to works such as those of Thorlac Turville-Petre and Katherine J. Lewis, looking at the presentation of the Anglo-Saxon past as a Golden Age, the holiness of the royal lines as shown by the saints

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which they produced, and the definition of the English against outside forces, against new Others in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁵ However, the concepts are here applied to Anglo-Saxon female saints, which not only broadens the subject matter, thus providing a more balanced approach to future studies of English identity, but also enlarges the audience-base for ideas of a group identity, as many of the texts in this thesis can be shown to have been read by women. This leads to a deeper understanding of how such identities were generated and propagated, involving a larger proportion of the population than has previously been discussed. This is dealt with in greater detail in the Introduction to Part B of this study.

Structure

The function of patron saints' *vitae* in the creation and fostering of communal identity has previously been examined with relation to a single location or a single saint.¹⁶ My study draws on a wider range of places and saints in order to form a clearer idea of how saints were viewed in medieval England. The focus on local saints, on Anglo-Saxon saints, allows one to see how historical figures become sources of power, and how that power is utilised in the development of notions of identity. Reading female saints and their nunneries enables the study to recover something of women's history, albeit still a small group of women. This, in turn, will provide a basis for future study of individual and groups of saints, to assess how the use of the various identities changed over time, and in different locations.

Chapter I lays out in greater detail than this introduction the saints, the nunneries and the texts which will be the focus of this study. It introduces the important characters, not only the saints, but their biographers and the nunneries who remembered the saints. The texts are divided into two types: those commissioned by particular groups, whether the identity of the group is known or not, and texts which are found in collections of saints' *vitae*, usually written for a broader, more general audience.

¹⁵ Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Katherine J. Lewis, 'Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives, History and National Identity in Late Medieval England', in *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, ed. by Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 160-170.

¹⁶ See, for example, Susan E. Wilson, *The Life and after-Life of St John of Beverley: The Evolution of the Cult of an Anglo-Saxon Saint* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

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Chapter II engages with the depictions of the identities of the saints both as historical people and as constructs of holy ideals. The historical person of the saints is presented by associating them with other historical characters, placing them in their correct time and giving them physical locations, proving the truth of the existence of the person. As a construct, on the other hand, there are certain features which are expected to be found both in a saint and her *vita*, relating to her interaction with other people, the way she faced death, and the miracles performed after death. This chapter investigates how these two sometimes competing identities are presented in the *vitae* and how the identities change over time as the texts are rewritten in different times and for different audiences.

Chapter III proceeds to the second layer of the saints' identities, those produced by and for the communities and the audiences. It builds on the previous chapter by concentrating on the interaction between the monastic communities and the texts which they commissioned. Centred mainly on the works of Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and Osbert of Clare, the chapter focuses on the tension between the historical person as held in the living memory of the nuns and the expectation of the Norman churchmen to whom the hagiographies were then dedicated. Later texts written for the same nunneries are also considered, showing how the influence of living memory fades, leaving a saint who is able to be rewritten for new concerns and ideals of sanctity.

The second part of the thesis has its own Introduction, opening with a discussion of the previous works produced on ideas of ethnic or national identity in the medieval period. Chapter IV then starts with a detailed discussion of the ideas of national or English identity. This builds on historians' research both on medieval concepts of nationhood, and on the roles which saints' lives have played in developing these notions. The chapter then expands the focus on identity to show how the Anglo-Saxon female saints' *vitae* utilised similar terminologies and concepts of English identities to those found in chronicles written after the Norman Conquest. This chapter discusses the hagiographies written in the century or so after the Conquest, and looks especially at how the Conquest and the arrival of the Normans

was, or was not, addressed in them.

Finally, Chapter V investigates later *vitae*, and examines how terminology for different ethnic groups within England had changed, and how the Hundred Years War (1340-1453) affected opinions of the English towards the invaders from the Continent. At a time when most Normans had been thoroughly integrated into English society, the Norman invaders were represented with more open hatred than at any time earlier.

Anglo-Saxon female saints in literary texts are not treated very differently from their male counterparts. They are shown interacting with a range of people during their lives and performing similar miracles after their deaths. The added tension of women exerting power over others is mitigated by the female saints being confined within their communities during their lives.¹⁷ Once they were dead, the gender difference appears to be subsumed under the role of a saint. The identities of the female saints are represented in similar ways to that of the male saints, and the negotiations between communities retaining living memory of the saints and audiences with potentially different ideas of sanctity are comparable. The existence of ideas of Englishness in the *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon female saints points to a vital source in studies of the development of Englishness. What is most important, however, is that the *vitae* studied here show the involvement of women in the commissioning and reading of texts about Anglo-Saxon female saints. In this way, we, the current readers, gain valuable insight into the attitudes to women and the Anglo-Saxon past which would have otherwise been lost to us. The texts can be interrogated to discover more about communities of nuns, and from the miracle stories attached to *vitae* we can also see something of the communities' interactions with their surrounding localities. Thus, on the one hand, these *vitae* point to a more widespread – a more popular – concept of Englishness than that presented only in androcentric texts such as chronicles and male hagiographies, while, on the other hand, they provide a valuable resource for the recovery of women's history.

¹⁷ See Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint*, Routledge Research in Medieval Studies, 1 (London: Routledge, 2000) for more on the tension between female saints and their male authors.

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Chapter I

Saints, Nunneries, Texts and Contexts

Nor are the English people deprived of the holy ones of the Lord, when in the land of the English lie such saints as this king, and Cuthbert the blessed, and Æthelthryth in Ely and also her sister, sound of body, to strengthen faith.

(Ælfric's *Life of St Edmund, King and Martyr*.¹)

Female saints in Anglo-Saxon England were either royal women or abbesses, and more commonly both. They were connected with the founding or refounding of nunneries, and the texts generated about them were initially closely tied to the nunneries as well. Later collections of *vitae* are harder to provide locations for, but they still tell us something about their audiences and about the audience expectations of saints.² The post-Conquest *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon female saints supply a perspective on women's history and role in the formation of ideas of community which otherwise seems absent.

Many queens and kings were recognised as saints because of the part which the royal family played in the adoption of Christianity in England. As Susan Ridyard has pointed out,

Anglo-Saxon England was remarkable for the very considerable number of its kings, princes and royal ladies who, in an age before the development of papal canonisation, had come to be venerated as saints by the regional church.³

Possibly only four of the eighteen female saints listed in the *Secgan be þam Godes sanctum þe on Engla lande ærost restan* are not directly of royal blood, Eadburh of Southwell, Æthelburh of Barking, and Ælflæd and Maerwyn of Romsey, but they were still abbesses.⁴ Ridyard has discussed how this series of royal saints led to a concept of royal sanctity, which seemed to

¹ 'Nis Angelcynn bedæled Drihtnes halgena, þonne on Engla lande licgað swilce halga swylce þes cyning, and Cupberht se eadiga, and Æþeldryð on Elig, and eac hire swustor, ansunde on lichaman, geleafan to trymminge.' *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. by Walter W. Skeat, EETS os. (76, 82), (92, 114), 2 vols (London: Trübner, 1881, 1900), vol 2, p. 333. My translation.

² Barbara Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 73.

³ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 1.

⁴ D.W. Rollason, 'Lists of saints' resting places in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 7 (1978) 61-93; Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 249, n. 34.

be able to be inherited along with the royal blood, at once a spiritual and a political idea.⁵ It is noticeable that, as the Anglo-Saxon royal line ceased to be important after the Norman Conquest, there were no more female saints from England recognised by Rome, despite the increase in the number of nunneries.⁶

The post-Conquest *vitae* record the Anglo-Saxon female saints as continuing to interact with the English people, and to perform miracles. It is not the aim of this work to verify or to disprove the supernatural phenomena recorded in the texts about these saints, but rather to look at how the representation of the saint and the nature of the miracles changed over time. However dubious the supernatural aspects of these narratives might be, the inclusion of the miracles, and the range of different types, provide data on the lives and thoughts of historical communities. Miracles recorded before the Conquest usually involved healing, guidance in actions, or finding lost or precious items. The arrival of the Danes led to an increase in miracles of protection and punishment, often protection of the saint's own community and punishment resulting in the death of the invaders. These protection miracles appear to have increased in popularity in the century after the Conquest – as a warning to the king and the bishops not to interfere with a saint's, and therefore a community's, land. Fourteenth and fifteenth-century miracles swing back to a focus on healing, owing to the lack of medical help in medieval life, and the decreased threat of land-seizure by foreign bishops. While this is a generalisation of the trends in miracles, it will be further demonstrated in subsequent chapters.

Nunneries and their Saints

Except for Ridyard's very valuable work, which covers both pre- and post-Conquest cults of royal saints, studies on saints or nunneries after the Norman Conquest do not cover Anglo-Saxon saints. Two useful books, those of Ronald Finucane and André Vauchez, focus on more recent saints, those created between 1066 and 1300 in the case of Finucane, and those from the twelfth century to the end of the Middle Ages in the case of Vauchez. This allows them to 'get back to the sources of the perception of sainthood and identify the signs by

⁵ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, see especially pp. 248-251.

⁶ Sally Thompson, *Women Religious* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 1-4.

which the people of that age – whoever they were – recognised the *virī Dei*, and to study those saints who were ‘real’ and ‘pilgrims [who] were “real”, regardless of what may be concluded about their miracles’.⁷ However, the saints in my thesis are no less ‘real’ than those saints found in Finucane’s book, *Miracles and Pilgrims*. They were all historically-attested people, with the possible exception of Wihthburh, one of St Æthelthryth’s sisters.

The four nunneries which stand at the centre of this study were all royal foundations which, given the Norman regime’s concern to present itself as the legitimate power in the land, remained popular and powerful even after the Conquest. Barbara Yorke points out that

the wealth accumulated during the tenth and eleventh centuries meant that the nunneries supported by the Anglo-Saxon royal house – Amesbury, Barking, Romsey, Shaftesbury, Wherwell, Wilton and Winchester (Nunnaminster) – were not only the wealthiest in England at the time of Domesday Book, but retained that position at the Dissolution.⁸

This means that they were in an ideal position to record, or have a record made of, the lives and deeds of their founding or patron saints. Amesbury, Shaftesbury and Wherwell are not included in this survey as the local dedications of the first two were to male saints, namely St Mellor (possibly Mellitus, bishop of Canterbury, *d.* 624) at Amesbury, and St Edward, Edith’s half-brother, at Shaftesbury, while Wherwell is dedicated to St Peter and the Holy Cross.⁹

Barking: Sts Æthelburh, Hildelith and Wulfhild

Barking recorded three saints: the first two abbesses of the abbey, Æthelburh and Hildelith, and Wulfhild, a tenth-century abbess. Barking was founded around 666 by St Eorcenwald for his sister Æthelburh, who was abbess of the nunnery until she died in *c.* 676. Æthelburh was not recorded as a royal woman, but her brother was closely connected to a number of important churchmen in seventh-century Kent. Not many deeds by her are remembered, in part because she lived so early in the conversion period, and so far from Bede’s place of

⁷ Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1977) pp. 11-12; André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. by Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 6.

⁸ Yorke, *Nunneries*, p. 72.

⁹ *The Heads of Religious Houses: England & Wales, 940-1216*, ed. by Dom David Knowles, C. N. L. Brooke & Vera London (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 207, 219, 222.

writing in Northumbria. Barking was also susceptible to Danish attacks, so that it is possible that the *libellus* from which Bede obtained his information about Æthelburh and Hildelith was lost in one of the raids. Bede records very few miracles attributed to Æthelburh, one of which was the bright light which shone over a plot of ground to indicate where the nuns of the abbey should be buried.¹⁰

Æthelburh was succeeded as abbess of Barking by Hildelith, who died c. 717, and was subsequently made a saint. Hildelith was probably the one to have the *libellus* written about Æthelburh, so we know very little about Hildelith's life, as she would not have been elevated to sainthood until after her death. Goscelin wrote a series of *lectiones* for her feast day, but beyond that we have little information about her.

The abbey was destroyed by the Danes in 870 and restored by King Edgar about one hundred years later, possibly as compensation for his amorous pursuit of Wulfhild, the aunt of Edith of Wilton. She was placed at Barking as abbess, but was later deposed during King Æthelred's reign by his mother, Ælfthryth. The Queen Mother ruled Barking in her stead, until an illness made her see the error of her ways. Wulfhild then returned to Barking and was reinstated as abbess before she died in 990.¹¹

In contrast to Æthelburh, Wulfhild was retained in the living memory of her community, and nuns who knew her spoke with the hagiographer, Goscelin of Saint-Bertin (c. 1040-1114), so that there is much greater detail recorded about her life. Along with her exciting escape from the advances of King Edgar, there are details of how she laboured alongside the other nuns, drawing water and carrying wood. The affection in which she was held by those under her is also visible in the interactions between Wulfhild and one of her students, Judith-Wulfruna, once the saint had died. Judith talked to Wulfhild as if she was present, bringing complaints to her, expecting Wulfhild to respond, and thanking her when she did.

¹⁰ Bede, *HE*, pp. 356-365.

¹¹ Marvin L. Colker, 'Texts of Jocelyn of Canterbury which Relate to the History of Barking Abbey', *Studia Monastica*, 7 (1965), 383-460 (pp. 428-429, 389-90).

Nunnaminster: St Eadburh

St Mary's, Winchester, more commonly referred to as Nunnaminster, was founded by Ealswith, the wife of Alfred the Great (r. 882-899), in conjunction with the king's founding of a monastery in the same city. It was finished by Edward the Elder (r. 899-924) and his third wife, Eadgifu, who placed their daughter, Eadburh, under the care of its abbess when she was very young. While John Leland, the sixteenth-century antiquarian, describes Eadburh as the first abbess, this does not seem right, as it appears that there was a community in existence before she arrived.¹² It is possible that Eadburh did become abbess later, but there is no mention of this in any of her *vitae*, and it appears that she died quite young after being sickly for some time.¹³

According to Osbert of Clare's *Vita Edburge*, Eadburh made clear her own calling to enter the nunnery at the age of three by choosing a paten, chalice and Gospel book over the royal garments. Her humility was later revealed by a nun, who hid to find out who had been secretly cleaning the nuns' shoes in the night, and her chastity was preserved and her holiness displayed when, on her nightly route to pray at the chapel of St Peter, some worthless ruffians lay in wait for her. They were blinded by God for their insolence and left to wander in the darkness until their friends and family came to find them. When they sought her forgiveness, Eadburh was shocked at what they had done, but ended by praying for them so that they regained their sight.¹⁴

At some point after Eadburh's death, she was made a saint, being translated first by her own community, and then again by Bishop Æthelwold in 963.¹⁵ Within Winchester, competition for pilgrims and offerings sprang up between Eadburh at St Mary's and St Swithun at the cathedral and was possibly a motivating factor in the production of the *vita* by Osbert,

¹² Yorke, *Nunneries*, p. 77.

¹³ See Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 33-34, 279-281.

¹⁴ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 264-66, 268-69, 276-79.

¹⁵ There is quite a problem with the dating of many of these saints (and kings – the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon disagree on the dates of Alfred's reign – either 870, 871, or 872 - 899 or 901): Eadburh's death is variously dated as 925 (*VCH*), 930 (Donald Attwater, *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints*, (Aylesbury: Penguin, 1965, repr. 1978), p. 109), and sometime after 939 (Ridyard, p. 17). Thus, regnal dates will be preferred.

sometime in the twelfth century.¹⁶

Romsey: St Ælfflæd

Romsey Abbey is recorded as being founded by Edward the Elder (r. 899-924), possibly around 907.¹⁷ His daughter, Ælfflæd, was entered into the nunnery and possibly became abbess. Her name is the same as that of the saint remembered there, a step-daughter of King Edgar, so there is some confusion over dates and people. The *Victoria County History* assumes the saint who is honoured there along with St Mary is the first St Ælfflæd/ Æthelflæd, rather than the daughter of Edgar's second wife.¹⁸ However, it is clear from the *vita* found in *MS Lansdowne 436* that the saint thus recorded is the second Ælfflæd. Her mother married Edgar in 964, two years after the death of her first husband, and Ælfflæd was given into the care of Abbess Maerwyn of Romsey, with whom she is most often associated in calendars.¹⁹ She became the fourth abbess of Romsey and died c. 992.

The surviving *vita* of Ælfflæd is dated to the fourteenth century, and so is much later than those of the other saints mentioned here. This means that it is hard to get more than a very general idea of her and her community. The holiness of her life is illustrated by almost generic descriptions: she was 'abundant in virtues, in mind humble, of joyful countenance, and kindly mannered to the poor'.²⁰ However, one miracle remembered about her was the glow of light which was emitted from her finger when the candles around the lectern blew out while she was reading the lesson in the chapel.²¹

Wilton: St Edith

The nunnery at Wilton was founded, according to the *Wilton Chronicle*, in 830 by King Egbert of Wessex (r. 802-30), for his sister Æthelburh, wife of Wulfstan, earl of Wilton.²² The nunnery survived the tenth-century Viking raids, remaining in the hands of nuns until the

¹⁶ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 17-18, n. 19.

¹⁷ Henry G. D. Liveing, *Records of Romsey Abbey*, (Winchester: Warren and Son, 1906), p. 11.

¹⁸ 'Houses of Benedictine nuns: Abbey of Romsey', *A History of the County of Hampshire: Volume 2* (1973), pp. 126-132. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=38097&strquery=Romsey>> [accessed: 28 July 2007].

¹⁹ Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, pp. 11-14, 325-6.

²⁰ Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, p. 20.

²¹ Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, p. 21.

²² *Wilton Chronicle*, ll. 138-153.

dissolution in 1539. The abbey was one of the most important nunneries in England, and had the fourth-highest income – money that came from many generous land grants.²³ It was a refuge from affairs of state for some of the most well-connected women: Æthelburh, the first prioress of the first foundation, was the sister of King Egbert; the first abbess of the second foundation, Radegund, was the daughter of the Earl of Wiltshire; Wulfthryth, mother of St Edith, is also described as a nobleman's daughter, and Edith's father was King Edgar (*r.* 959-75); Ælflæd, wife of Edward the Elder (*r.* 899-924), and two of her daughters were buried there; and Edith, the wife of Edward the Confessor (*r.* 1042-66) and daughter of Earl Godwin, was educated at Wilton, and returned there for a time during the troubles of her husband's reign.²⁴

According to Goscelin, Wulfthryth retired there from her marriage to Edgar in 961, along with her daughter Edith. At the age of two, Edith signalled her devotion to God as Eadburh was said to have done, by choosing the black veil of a nun over the bright jewels of her secular inheritance. However, in later years Edith was famous for wearing royal garments, though the nuns around her knew that underneath she wore a hair-shirt. Edith apparently played a role in courtly life while her father was alive, but steadfastly refused marriage, and when her half-brother Edward died, possibly as a result of poisoning by his step-mother, she was also resolute in refusing the offer of the kingdom, which went eventually to another half-brother, Æthelred (*r.* 978-1013, 1014-16).²⁵

Edith's role in the nunnery is unclear. Along with her reputation for not wearing the traditional black of a nun, she also kept a menagerie, and the miracles reported during her life are more about God's protection of her than of her healing and helping others. A candle falling into the chest containing her clothes miraculously failed to burn them, and a fragment of a nail from the True Cross clearly showed that she and her mother should not have to file it in half in order to share it with Bishop Æthelwold, since the filings re-integrated themselves

²³ Bell, *What Nuns Read*, pp. 10-11.

²⁴ 'Houses of Benedictine nuns: Abbey of Wilton', *A History of the County of Wiltshire: Volume 3* (1956), pp. 231-242. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=36533>> [accessed: 30 November 2006].

²⁵ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 28-29, 38, 51-52,

so that the nail was once again whole after it was left overnight.²⁶

She died on the sixteenth of September 984, and was soon raised to the status of a saint by King Æthelred, Bishop Æthelwold (or Archbishop Dunstan, in Goscelin's version) and her mother Wulfthryth.²⁷ Both Goscelin and Malmesbury attribute Edith's renown among the English people to her association with two kings: Æthelred, who had her translated, and Cnut, who had (according to Malmesbury) scoffed at the idea of Edgar having any holy children, until rebuked by the saint herself, who sat up from her stone tomb and shook her finger at him.²⁸

Ely: St Æthelthryth and her sisters

Ely was not a nunnery at the time of the Conquest, but it is of interest to this study as the home of the cult of Æthelthryth and her sisters and nieces, a powerful group of female saints. Æthelthryth was the daughter of King Anna of the East Angles (*d.* 654) and after first being married to Tonbert of the Gyrwys, she became the first wife of King Ecgrith of Northumbria (*r.* 670-85) before retiring to Ely where she founded a monastic house in 660. Most of her sisters and nieces also became saints. After her death in 679, she was succeeded as abbess by her sister and then her niece, as the monastery of Ely became a centre for the cult of the daughters and grand-daughters of King Anna. Her double monastery was refounded by Æthelwold as a Benedictine male house during the reign of Edgar. Æthelthryth, Seaxburh, Eormenhild and Wihtburh remained the patron saints of the male house, and, possibly owing to their relationships with the various royal houses, were popular throughout much of England. They form a point of comparison to the Anglo-Saxon female saints remembered in the women's houses, as the male houses, and Ely in particular, were generally better supported by gifts of money and land, and held better records than their female counterparts.

Following Bede's record of Æthelthryth's life, numerous re-writings appeared, in Latin, Old English, French and Middle English. Ely's other claim to fame was that it was the centre of

²⁶ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 41-42, 43-44, 44-46,

²⁷ *Heads of Religious Houses*, p. 223; Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 69-71.

²⁸ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), (*GPA*) pp. 298-301; Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 69-71, 77-78.

the last rebellion against William the Conqueror, led by Hereward the Wake. As such, questions of identity and Englishness are of great significance to this area, and show up in texts written in and around Ely, which in turn influence the selection and presentation of events which are recorded in the *vitae* of Æthelthryth and her sisters.

Commissioned Texts

The saints in this study come from a range of areas around England, and from different periods before the Conquest. In a similar way, the texts studied here vary in the dates and the locations of their writing. They are divided into two groups, those texts commissioned by communities and those which are found in larger collections. Commissioned texts were heavily influenced by their intended audiences, as the hagiographers had to take into account the memories of the saints preserved at the different locations. At the same time, the finished work was often dedicated to an important churchman and needed to conform to orthodox understandings of saints so that the bishop or archbishop would not only accept, but approve of the finished *vitae*, in order that the author might gain further employment.

The earliest record of some of the saints is Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Within his work, as is seen in the title, there was already a sense of an 'English people', even while he describes the various different kingdoms which made up what is now 'England'. In the Preface, Bede claims to be writing

the sayings and doings of men of old, and more especially the famous men of *our own race* [*nostræ gentis*] in particular. Should history tell of good men and their good estate, the thoughtful listener is spurred on to imitate the good; should it record the evil ends of wicked men, no less effectually the devout and earnest listener or reader is kindled to eschew what is harmful and perverse.²⁹ [Emphasis mine.]

This is already signalling an apparent sense of common identity, a sense of community, focused in the development of Christianity among the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The inclusion of other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms with Bede's Northumbria does suggest that a multi-tribal, ethnic identity, or even a national identity, is being used. Interestingly, the Latin term used here for 'our own race' is given two different translations by Colgrave and Mynors on the

²⁹ Bede, *HE*, pp. 2-3.

same page: *'nostræ gentis'* is glossed as 'nation' in the title of the text.³⁰

While the preface dedicates the work to King Ceolwulf, who resigned his throne in 737 to become a monk in Lindesfarne, there is clearly a much greater audience intended, and it is not necessarily expected to be a literate audience. In the extract above, the audience is signalled as a listener twice, and only once as a reader. Bede was writing about a largely oral culture, with the intent that his work should be a record of the collective past of the group. He demonstrates the lengths to which he went to gather information and to include what he considered important to this community. English saints are one of those things he saw as important, but he was careful to record events which were long established legends or had had witnesses in texts or reliable eyewitness reports. He clearly had a desire for these stories to be validated, and to produce a reliable history. Thus, throughout the *Ecclesiastical History* Bede refers his audience to 'the trustworthy testimony of reliable witnesses'.³¹

The issue of audience is one which also affected the work of Goscelin of Saint-Bertin (c. 1040-1114). The saints' *vitae* which he produced were written at the request of the communities which remembered the saints. In the case of Wilton, there were nuns alive who could recall the stories passed down to them from those who personally knew Edith and Wulfthryth.³² As such, his documentation of them had to accord with the communal memory of these witnesses. At the same time, Goscelin dedicated the finished works to various Norman churchmen: the *vitae* of the Barking saints to Maurice, bishop of London, and the *vita* of Edith to Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury.³³ Although Goscelin had arrived in England around 1058, the *vitae* relevant to this study were completed much later. He is seen as one of the figures who 'contributed substantially to the cultural fusion of the two peoples' by mediating between Anglo-Saxon saints and Norman authorities.³⁴ In balancing the expectations of the nunneries with the stricter ideals of these more sceptical newcomers on how women in general and women saints in particular should behave, Goscelin made little comment on the

³⁰ Bede, *HE*, pp. 2-3.

³¹ Bede, *HE*, pp.6- 7.

³² Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 24.

³³ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 398; Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 23.

³⁴ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 384.

ethnic identity of the saints. In his dedication of the *vita* of Edith to Lanfranc, the Conquest was glossed over, treated merely as the natural progression of kings from Edward, her nephew, down to the current king, William.³⁵

Osbert of Clare, while working in Latin, was much more vocal about his own task of translating Anglo-Saxon saints for Norman readers, and thus causes his audience to be more aware of potential differences between cultures. By repeatedly referring to English names and English customs, Osbert stressed the presence in England of a non-English audience. Like Goscelin, he was writing at the request of a community who remembered the saint but tailored his work for a much wider audience. Osbert's *vita* of St Eadburh appears to have been written not only for the nuns of Nunnaminster in Winchester, but also for the monks of Pershore, who had acquired some of Eadburh's relics later, as related in an account preserved in the *vita*. Pershore (Worcs.) then became the new centre for Eadburh's miracles, a shift which caused some hardship for the women of Nunnaminster.³⁶ Here, then, we have a competing ownership of the saint, both physically and discursively. The relating of the miracles which occurred in Pershore after Eadburh arrived there had to be balanced with the needs of a nunnery which had not completely relinquished its claim to her.³⁷

Thus, the saints' *vitae* provide not only an indication of contemporary views of both saints and women, but also a sense of the audiences and their needs at different times. Goscelin and Osbert were two of the most active hagiographers in the post-Conquest period, and so the *vitae* which they produced are valuable historical sources.

Goscelin: Edith, Æthelburh and Wulfhild

Goscelin of Saint-Bertin arrived in England some time before 1065. He probably came as a companion to Herman, the Norman bishop of Sherbourne and Ramsbury from 1058-1078. During this time, he apparently visited Wilton, 'gathering material for his Legend of Edith

³⁵ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 23-4. See Jay Rubenstein, 'Liturgy against History', for an indication that Lanfranc was not being deliberately anti-Anglo-Saxon, but instead concerned to promote a more Christ-focused church year.

³⁶ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 302-3.

³⁷ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 301-2.

from the reports of senior nuns,' and possibly served as a chaplain there. After Herman's death, however, Goscelin left Wiltshire 'because of the hostility of [Herman's] successor, Bishop Osmund,' and spent time in various communities, writing up saints' lives as he went.³⁸

According to William of Malmesbury, Goscelin was a prolific hagiographer:

for in the celebration of the English saints he was second to none since Bede. [...] He composed, for example, lives of countless saints of modern times, and rewrote in a more elegant fashion those of ancient saints either lost by enemy action or published with no grace of style.³⁹

Two versions of Goscelin's *Legend of Edith* have survived, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C 938, fols 1-29 (thirteenth century) and Cardiff, Public Library, MS I. 381, fols 81-120 (early twelfth century). The Rawlinson version includes a prologue dedicating the *vita* to Archbishop Lanfranc, and Wright and Hollis both argue that the Cardiff *vita* was the one intended for the nuns at Wilton.⁴⁰ While he wrote the *Legend of Edith* at the request of the community at Wilton, he did not complete it until 1080, when he dedicated it to Archbishop Lanfranc as his 'first fruit'.⁴¹ Goscelin also recorded *vitae* of Æthelburh and Wulfhild, along with lessons for Hildelith and an account of the translation of the three saints, sometime between 1086 and 1114, as the *vitae* are dedicated to Bishop Maurice of London.⁴² These *vitae* are found together in Dublin, Trinity College, MS 176 (E. 5.28).⁴³

Goscelin's *Legend of Edith*, then, was initially written for a community of women, a community which retained memories of Edith. However, the finished work was seen as fit to be presented to the archbishop. Goscelin's writing was not exclusively directed at a female audience, nor at an audience of churchmen. While the revised version includes more personal details about Edith and the community, Stephanie Hollis remarks that '[i]t is

³⁸ Stephanie Hollis, 'Goscelin and the Wilton Women', in *Writing the Wilton Women*, pp. 218, 219, 220.

³⁹ Malmesbury, *GRA*, IV: 342, pp. 592-3.

⁴⁰ Wright "Note on the Translation of the Legend of Edith", pp. 17-19 (p. 17); Hollis, 'Goscelin's Writings and the Wilton Women', pp. 217-244 (pp. 237-242).

⁴¹ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 24; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS C938, fols 1-19. See Hollis, 'Goscelin and the Wilton Women', pp. 236-8.

⁴² Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 387.

⁴³ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 392-393.

unlikely that he had omitted them because he thought that Lanfranc would find them unacceptable', with only a few items in the first version appearing to be more orthodox than those found in the second.⁴⁴ For example, the Rawlinson version presents Edith as reading the *vitae* of female saints, while the Cardiff version shows her having a special devotion to the (male) apostles and St Denis, and composing prayers. The hagiographer seems to think that the bishop may not have considered such actions suitable for a young woman.⁴⁵

A very similar situation seems to have occurred around Goscelin's work on the Barking abbesses. The *vitae* of both Æthelburh and Wulfhild are dedicated to Bishop Maurice of London, in the expectation that he would

not only accept fitly the good of the treasure and gems of Christ, but even defend them powerfully against the teeth of the fierce who prefer to condemn what is unknown to them before they learn about it.⁴⁶

This may have been an implicit criticism of Archbishop Lanfranc, who is famous for burning the bones of some of Winchester's saints in order to test their holiness, although Goscelin does not seem to have any trouble in dedicating the *Legend of Edith* to him in c. 1080.

Osbert's Vita Edburge

Osbert of Clare was from Suffolk, and was the prior of Westminster until he was passed over for abbot, in 1121, by Henry I in favour of the (Norman) almoner, Herbert.⁴⁷ He then, apparently, became '*proscriptus*', an exile, and spent time wandering from monastery to monastery from some time before 1123, when he was established in Ely for a while.⁴⁸ What we know of him during this time is mostly gleaned from his letters, but their obscure wording, either by intention or through omission, means that we do not know why he had to

⁴⁴ Hollis, 'Goscelin and the Wilton Women', pp. 240-1.

⁴⁵ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 34.

⁴⁶ "*bonum nummularium et gemmarium Christi, non solum probiliter assumere uerum etiam contra ferocium dentes potenter defendere qui ante malunt ignota damnare quam prenoscere*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 418.

⁴⁷ J. Armitage Robinson, 'A Sketch of Osbert's Career' in *The Letters of Osbert of Clare*, ed. by E. W. Williamson (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp. 1-2.

⁴⁸ Robinson, 'Osbert's Career', p. 2.

leave Westminster.⁴⁹ Presumably there was some difference of opinion between the abbot and him: a letter to Herbert was 'written in self-justification and as a plea for restoration. But it is throughout the letter of an equal'.⁵⁰ Ten years later he still described himself as outlawed, but in 1134 we find him again as prior of Westminster.⁵¹

Osbert's work is the longest and most comprehensive form of the *vita* of Eadburh, and is found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 114 (fols 85-120), and edited by Susan Ridyard in *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*.⁵² The manuscript also contains Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*, with an incomplete ending, followed by a series of saints' lives in roughly calendar order: St Andrew the Apostle, St Vincent, St Ignatius, St Blaise, St William, St Audoen (possibly two different lives), St Eadburh, St Thomas of Canterbury (written on blank pages in the same quire as Eadburh, but in a different hand), St Frideswide, St Winifred, and St Katherine. N.R. Ker has ascribed the manuscript to Pershore on palaeographical grounds, which is further bolstered by the inclusion of the *vita* of Eadburh with the prologue composed for the Pershore monks, a late medieval scribble of 'Pershor' on fol. 23, and the placing of the Eadburh text in order for the commemoration of her translation to Pershore in October.⁵³

The text is divided into three parts, the *vita*, the *translatio*, and an account of Eadburh's removal to Pershore and her career there. In the introductory letter, Osbert claimed to be writing this new work in order to supply the Pershore monks with an up-to-date version in a better style than an earlier source, which 'lacked both clarity and elegance'.⁵⁴ Ridyard questions the existence of a pre-existing work for the whole piece, as Osbert of Clare was one of the foremost forgers of the twelfth century. However, when comparing Osbert's *vita* to other texts about Eadburh, there does appear to have been some source from which they

⁴⁹ Robinson, 'Osbert's Career', pp. 2-3.

⁵⁰ Robinson, 'Osbert's Career', p. 4.

⁵¹ Robinson, 'Osbert's Career', p. 13.

⁵² Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 22-23, 255-308.

⁵³ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 255-57, n. 7.

⁵⁴ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 23.

drew their information independently.⁵⁵

Pershore Miracula

The *Pershore Miracula* (London, British Library, Harley 64, fols 184r-185v) was written exclusively for Pershore, for the benefit of the monks there. The very brief life (little more than a prologue) covers St Eadburh's choice at age three of the monastic rule and describes her growing in grace and favour, cleaning the other nuns' shoes, and performing numerous unspecified miracles. There is no mention of how her relics came to be at Pershore because the main point of the text is the recording of the modern miracles, as Ridyard points out:

The author explains his decision to include only the most recent of Edburga's miracles by stressing that the saint's life and early miracles had already received ample hagiographical coverage; and he makes it clear that this coverage had been not only in Latin but also in English.⁵⁶

Not only had the life and early miracles received plenty of attention elsewhere, but that same manuscript also contained a version of Eadburh's life taken from William of Malmesbury's work (fols 84-85).⁵⁷

The audience, therefore, is already expected to know Eadburh, so that these recent miracles recorded are an indication of the saint's ongoing miracle-work at Pershore. The prologue then serves to differentiate Eadburh from other saints (perhaps of the same name) more than provide information on her life. This late thirteenth-century manuscript includes eight miracles which had been performed recently through Eadburh's intervention at the monastery.⁵⁸ Here there is no need to consider the nuns of Nunnaminster. What is of concern to the author is that the contemporary miracles should be recorded and remembered as part of the history of Pershore. Some of the beneficiaries are referred to by name, suggesting that the audience might be familiar with the people (all men, in the *Pershore Miracula*), or might at least be able to find out more by asking about them. It would appear

⁵⁵ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 25-30.

⁵⁶ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 30.

⁵⁷ William of Malmesbury recorded Eadburh in both *GPA* (II: 78.3-6, pp. 274-75) and *GRA* (II: 217, pp. 400-403), with both versions being almost identical. See Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 27, n 62.

⁵⁸ Laurel Brasewell, 'Saint Edburga of Winchester: a study of her cult, a.d. 950-1500', *Medieval Studies*, 33 (1971), 292-33, (p. 305).

that the audience is very local.

Wilton Chronicle and Life of St Etheldrede

The *Wilton Chronicle* is found in London, British Library, Cotton Faustina B iii, (fols. 194-280), bound with some older manuscripts.⁵⁹ It contains a Middle English verse history of the founding of Wilton, which then leads into the life and miracles of St Edith based in large part on Goscelin's *Legend of Edith*. Following the *Chronicle*, there is another list of 'founders', and then a *Life of St Etheldrede*.⁶⁰ These three items belong together, being written in the same hand, and with the two Middle English sections, on either side of the list of the founders of Wilton, being written in the same dialect.⁶¹ The focus on Wilton Abbey, in both the *Wilton Chronicle* and the list of founders, is strong evidence for these items to have been written at or near Wilton, further supported by Horstmann's identification of the dialect as 'Wiltshire'.⁶²

The texts of the two saints' *vitae* are unique examples of these stories but the work is not an autograph manuscript as there are erasures and revisions throughout.⁶³ Internal evidence suggests that the original works were written by a Wilton author (either a chaplain, or, unfortunately less likely, a nun) for the Wilton nuns. Both employ the same metrical and stanzaic form, and evidence from the list of founders indicates that they were written during the reign of Henry V, which Horstmann further narrows down to c. 1420. The author lists sources at the end and in the margins for some of the episodes, which include *Legenda Scie. Editha*; *Chronica Cistrensis*; *William Ryualensis*; *Walter Oxfordiensis*; *Henricus Crompe*; a *Miraculum*; *Bede*; *Somnium miraculosum*; and *Marianus Scotus*. This list of chroniclers and historians indicates that the author of the *Wilton Chronicle* was well-read, a suggestion further supported by the ways in which the writer has used and rearranged these sources in the

⁵⁹ See also Mary Dockray-Miller, *Saints Edith and Æthelthryth: Princesses, Miracle Workers, and their Late Medieval Audience: The Wilton Chronicle and the Wilton Life of St Æthelthryth* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); Wiesje Emons-Nijenhuis, 'The Embedded Saint, The *Wilton Chronicle*'s Life of St Wulfthryth', *Revue Benedictine*, 119 (2009), 86-120.

⁶⁰ Virginia Blanton says this is a list of the prioresses of the abbey (Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2007), p. 249) – but as the names are all male, it is most likely a list of the male founders.

⁶¹ Horstmann, *Wilton Chronicle*, pp. 1, 282.

⁶² Horstmann, *Wilton Chronicle*, p. 282.

⁶³ Dockray-Miller, *Saints Edith and Æthelthryth*, p. 34.

creation of his text.

According to Horstmann, a different scribal hand starts at line 1111 in *Etheldrede*, beginning to add in the tale of Æthelthryth's escape from Ecgfrith, after the original hand appears to have brought the story to a satisfactory conclusion.⁶⁴ The second scribe, who penned a short, unfinished passage at the end of *Etheldrede*, was perhaps not as well-educated as the main author – as he (or she) apparently needed help from the sexton at Ely to read the story he was about to relate, which does not appear to have been a problem for the main scribe at Godstow. On the other hand, it is possible that the Godstow source was written in the vernacular, whether English or Anglo-Norman, and that the writer was able read that, while not having enough Latin to deal with the *Liber Eliensis*.⁶⁵ This suggestion could be used as an argument for a female writer, at least for that section, as David Bell suggests that, while not necessarily ignorant of Latin, nuns in the fifteenth century were likely to be more comfortable with a vernacular, either English or Anglo-Norman.⁶⁶

Liber Eliensis

The *Liber Eliensis* is a history of the community at Ely from the founding of the double house of monks and nuns in the seventh century, through the establishment of the Benedictine monks in 970, down to the compiler's own period in the twelfth century. Janet Fairweather describes it as a 'source-book', which brought together history, charters, and other texts from 'monastic archives that had never been adequately sorted or set out in chronological order'.⁶⁷ It appears to be written for the monastery, and the writer states his intention to collate as much as he can for future posterity:

I have undertaken to set down some material from this work [histories, chronicles, English and Latin writs, wills and the reports of the faithful], my object being that matters which deserve to be made the subject of preaching should not be left unwritten as if unknown, or wasted away and effaced by old age. For when the

⁶⁴ Horstmann, *Wilton Chronicle*, p. vii, 282

⁶⁵ As seems highly probable when one takes into account the need for the nuns in Godstow to have their cartulary translated – see Bell, *What Nuns Read*, p. 65

⁶⁶ Bell, *What Nuns Read*, pp. 57-96.

⁶⁷ *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth*, trans. by Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005) (*LE*), pp. xiii-xv.

philosopher, or good historiographer, who has long been awaited, attempts to take up his pen, there will be many places where he will not find raw material.⁶⁸

It is therefore not envisaged by the compiler as an end in itself, but a collection of sources awaiting the arrival of the 'good historiographer'.

There are two main manuscripts of the *Liber Eliensis*: Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.1 (twelfth century) and Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Dean and Chapter of Ely MS: *Liber Eliensis* (thirteenth century). The second manuscript is longer than the first, but there are places where it does not make sense, so it may be a faulty copy of the first.⁶⁹ It is special as it 'preserves a wealth of data on the social organization, economics and government, national and local, of pre-Conquest England' while also containing 'some rattling good tales about Hereward's resistance to William the Conqueror and another, later, anti-Norman conspiracy'.⁷⁰ The text it contains of Æthelthryth's life and those of her sister and nieces is based on Bede, along with another English source, and also Goscelin's *vitae* of the Ely ladies. The compiler himself is devoted to Æthelthryth, and includes some recent miracles which are later picked up on in some of the collected *vitae*.

The Collected Vitae

It is much harder to locate a particular audience for the collections of saints' *vitae* which include the Anglo-Saxon female saints. Some may have been written as bases for sermons, or for use in church as liturgical remembrances, others as exempla for enclosed monks or nuns, to attempt to imitate.

Lives of Anglo-Saxon female saints are found both in collections of exclusively English *vitae*, and also in wider-ranging works. Some collections are written in Latin, and were probably intended for priestly use, although MS Lansdowne 436 found its way into the library of the Romsey nunnery early on in the manuscript's history. While there is no sign that it was actually used there, other texts were probably more widely read. The Lives included in the

⁶⁸ *LE*, Prologue, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, pp. xxv-xxvii.

⁷⁰ Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, p. xiv.

Middle English collection entitled *Lyves and Dethes of the Martyrs* suggest an audience interested in English female saints, among more wide-ranging universal saints.⁷¹

South English Legendary

The *South English Legendary* (*South English Legendary*) is a convenient name for a large and varied collection of manuscripts (twenty-four major ones, but totalling over sixty) containing a range of saints' *vitae*, written from the late thirteenth century to the fourteenth. Manfred Görlach, who has surveyed most of the extant manuscripts, says that 'there is no reliable indication as to either date or place of origin, or even to the author's intention, or the use these texts actually served when they were current in the 14 C'.⁷²

Disappointingly, there are not many Anglo-Saxon female saints included, and those that are show up in only a few manuscripts. In *Signs of Devotion*, Virginia Blanton lists six Anglo-Saxon women as being recorded in the various *South English Legendary* manuscripts: Frideswide (6 manuscripts + 1 fragment), Mildrith (3+1), Eadburh (3), Æthelthryth (3), and Helen (1+1) and Wenefrid (1).⁷³ Of these, only Mildrith, Eadburh, and Æthelthryth appear in the same three manuscripts. The three manuscripts are London, British Library, MS Egerton 1993 (c. 1320), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS English Poetry a.1 (Vernon) (c. 1380), and MS Bodleian 2567 (Bodley 779) (fifteenth century), the last of which also, according to Blanton, includes Wenefrid. These manuscripts belong to (but are not the complete extant collection of) the 'E' redaction of the *South English Legendary*, which is located by Görlach in Worcester and is 'characterised by the inclusion of saints connected with the Worcester cult and the Use of Hereford'.⁷⁴

That the three manuscripts contain the three lives of Mildrith, Eadburh and Æthelthryth, and that these lives are not found in other manuscripts (other than a fragment of Mildrith), suggests that perhaps these manuscripts were compiled with a different intention from most

⁷¹ Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 2604.

⁷² Manfred Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1974), p. 1.

⁷³ Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 239.

⁷⁴ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, p. 55.

of the others.⁷⁵ Blanton points out that these three women are

presented as virgin daughters of Anglo-Saxon kings. [...] As representatives of East Anglia, Kent and Wessex, each demonstrates a regional history of England, and this may be the reason they are grouped together.⁷⁶

However, while the *vita* of St Eadburh certainly does emphasise her royal origin, spending the first twenty-seven lines on her father, Edward king of Wessex, and the other saintly royals of the same line, the *vita* of Æthelthryth only mentions her father in two lines: 'king of ingelond of al þe est ende/ king anne he was ihote' (ll. 2-3). The Mildrith *vita*, as with most of the Mildrith legends, starts with the story of her brothers' deaths, explaining how she came to be abbess of Thanet.⁷⁷

From this, one can gain the impression that either Eadburh's lineage is more important to the writer than Æthelthryth's, thus making it more likely to be written for a Wessex audience, or conversely, that Æthelthryth's history is already known to the audience, and thus she needs little introduction. Given the area in which these versions of *South English Legendary* appear to have been written, the first explanation seems more tenable. Æthelthryth's story is only 50 lines, and only tells the basic outline of her life, with no miracles attached. Eadburh's *vita*, on the other hand, is 114 lines long, and that of Mildrith is 152. They both include more focused detail on the personality of the saint than is given for Æthelthryth.

Blanton goes on to suggest that the inclusion of these three saints in the same manuscripts of the *South English Legendary* 'support[s] the argument that insular saints were honored as part of a nationalistic impulse'.⁷⁸ However, this would surely lead to *all* the women saints appearing in the same texts together, not just the three virgin daughters. Also, more copies of the *South English Legendary* should then have included Anglo-Saxon female saints,

⁷⁵ Quotes for Æthelthryth are from the Vernon manuscript, Bodleian Library, MS English Poetry a. 1, fol 33r-33v (see Appendix A for my transcription); quotes for Eadburh are from Braswell, 'Saint Edburga of Winchester', pp. 325-26; quotes for Mildrith are from Paul Acker, 'Saint Mildred in the *South English Legendary*', in *South English Legendary: a Critical Assessment*, ed. by Klaus P. Jankofsky (Tubingen: Verlag, 1992), pp. 140-55.

⁷⁶ Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 240-241.

⁷⁷ Acker, 'Saint Mildred', pp. 145-46.

⁷⁸ Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 241.

especially those copies which include so many of the Anglo-Saxon male saints.

It appears, therefore, that these women were included specifically at the request of the intended audience, that they had some significance for a small group of people. The *South English Legendary* being what it is, there was an opportunity for a small community (or three) to have their own version copied especially for them, and they could specify who was included. If there was not a version of a particular saint's life yet in circulation, the mode of verse was such that it could be composed without too much trouble.

This argument is reinforced by the very separate circulation of the *South English Legendary* recensions containing the *vitae* of St Frideswide. While she is included in the index to the Vernon manuscript, there is no sign of her in the text. The manuscripts in which she does figure have all apparently originated from around the Oxford area, which supports the claim of including local saints: not a nationalism so much as regionalism.⁷⁹ Frideswide is also different in that there are two very separate versions of her life in circulation, based on extant Latin lives, while the other Anglo-Saxon women are recorded with only one version each, varying in line length and dialect, but not in the basic story.⁸⁰

The MS Egerton 1993 *vita* of Eadburh was edited by Laurel Braswell in 1971, but Görlach cautions that it 'contains more than thirty errors and misprints'.⁸¹ Mildrith's *vita* from the same manuscript is edited by Paul Acker, along with variants from the other manuscripts, while Æthelthryth's *vita* has not been published yet. My transcription of the Vernon MS version appears as Appendix A of this thesis.

BL Lansdowne 436

The audience for London, British Library MS Lansdowne 436 must have been an educated one and also one interested in the Anglo-Saxon past. The manuscript is written in Latin, in a tidy *anglicana* script and contains a unique indexed history of the kings of England from

⁷⁹ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 196-7.

⁸⁰ *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, ed. by Sherry L. Reames (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), p. 24-25; Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 174, 175, 179, 196-7.

⁸¹ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, p. 280, n. 191.

Hengist to Egbert on folios 2r-5v. This history is sadly mutilated, as the first two folios have had strips of about an inch cut from their outside edge, and also appears to be unfinished. It has not been edited yet, probably owing to the state of the first leaves. The rest of the manuscript (fols 6r-131v) contains the *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon saints, both male and female, along with the lives of the first missionary bishops, Augustine, Laurentius, Mellitus and Paulinus. The *vitae* of the last four names listed in the index on fol. 1v are lost, along with most of the final *vita*, that of one Wulfricus. It appears a whole quire is missing, as there is a catch-phrase at the bottom of 131v. The manuscript belonged to Romsey from an early period in its history, as the first folio includes the inscription '*Iste liber est de librario ecche sce Marie et sce Ethelflede uiginis, de Romesey*' in a contemporary hand.

The Anglo-Saxon female *vitae* in MS Lansdowne 436 are scattered throughout, but form a substantial collection of the more widely celebrated female saints: Wærburh, daughter of Eormenhild, Osyth, Æthelthryth and her sisters (Seaxburh, Æthelburh, Wihtburh), Cuthburh, Eadburh, Ælfflæd and Maerwyn, Milburh, Frideswide, Hild, Winifred, Ebba, and Modwenna. Because there is no special mention of their saint, Ælfflæd, it does not appear to have been specifically written for Romsey, despite the inscription. Nor does it seem to have been read very much at Romsey; there are not even any special marks beside the text of Ælfflæd and Maerwyn, which one might expect in a text used by the community to commemorate their saints. Therefore, the intended audience for MS Lansdowne 436 may well have been another religious house, but there is nothing to link the manuscript with any other institution. The nuns at Romsey were known to have pride in their Anglo-Saxon past, but this pride seems to have taken the form of the production of *vitae* of royal mothers and grandmothers, at the expense of remembering their own saints in greater detail.⁸²

As the manuscript is written in Latin, it appears to be intended for an educated audience, or at least an audience which had someone who could translate for them. The nuns of Romsey Abbey, on the other hand, were revealed as having lost much of their Latin learning by 1311,

⁸² Elisabeth van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900-1200* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 139.

when Bishop Henry of Winchester visited. The bishop's instructions required that his orders be 'translated into French, that they may more easily understand them; they shall be recited before all, in Chapter', which further suggests the manuscript was not written at the request of the community.⁸³ This is not to say that they would not have been able to read MS Lansdowne 436, as there is a difference in the depth of comprehension needed for instructions which will affect daily life and that needed for the reading of lives of saints which, although more liturgical, do not necessarily need to be understood in detail. The *History* may, therefore, have been a gift to the nunnery which was used, though not often, as it shows very little signs of wear on the pages.

This record of Anglo-Saxon history and saints was apparently composed separately from Tynemouth's collection, the *Nova Legenda Anglie*. While many of the saints occur in both collections of *vitae*, the texts owe little to each other.

Nova Legenda Anglie and The Kalendre of the newe Legende of Englande

Carl Horstmann attributes the impetus to collect the *vitae* of English, Welsh and Scottish saints into one *Legenda* as a result of an English 'national idea [which] has always been prominent as against the 'foreigner', and was then intensified by the French wars'. He asserts that the production of the *Nova Legenda Anglie* was an answer to the Continental *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa 1292-8, a collection of 'the generally acknowledged saints of the whole Catholic Church'. John of Tynemouth (born c. 1290, vicar of Tynemouth c. 1315) originally conceived, collected and abridged the collection of Latin *vitae* of English (and Welsh and Scottish) saints, while John Capgrave (1393-1464) rearranged it into alphabetical order. It was later printed in a further abridged English translation, *The Kalendre of the newe Legende of Englande*, by Wynkyn de Worde in 1516.⁸⁴

The collection, then, had a range of intended users, rather than a single audience.

Tynemouth's layout of a calendar format would suggest a liturgical use, either for church use or for private prayer and meditation. The alphabetical arrangement provided by Capgrave

⁸³ Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, p. 105.

⁸⁴ *Nova Legenda Anglie*, ed. by Carl Horsmann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), pp. x, xxxiii, xxxvi, xxi.

would appear to make it easier to find a particular saint if one did not know their feast day, a task which is made harder by many saints having at least two and sometimes three feasts. This new arrangement would make it more useful in compiling sermons based around an idea rather than a particular saints' day.⁸⁵ However, that de Worde printed and translated it suggests that he saw the collection as having a wide appeal, and to an audience who read English rather than Latin. This is a sign of the continuing interest of the lay public in collections of English saints.

The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres

The final text which is considered in this study is the unique Middle English collection found in Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 2604.⁸⁶ This manuscript, entitled *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*, contains twenty-two *vitae*, of which eleven are Anglo-Saxon female saints, (Æthelthryth of Ely, Seaxburh, Eormenhild, Wærburh, Wihtburh, Eorcongota, Edith of Wilton, Eadburh of Thanet, Eanswith of Folkestone, Hild of Whitby, and Modwenna of Ireland), eight are universal women (Columba of Sens, Agatha, Cecilia, Barbara, Martha, Domitilla, Justina, and Benedicta), and only three are men: John the Baptist, John the Evangelist and Leonard.

The manuscript is dated to the second half of the fifteenth century, and is a fair copy, with few scribal mistakes, on very fine vellum. It is, however, faulty, with twenty-nine leaves missing at various points and it does not contain an index, so there is no real indication of how many other *vitae* were originally in the collection. There are, for example, eight pages missing from the end of Eanswith's *vita* and the beginning of Hild's. To judge from the length of Hild's *vita* in the *Nova Legenda Anglie*, it is possible that there was nothing between the two, but we cannot be certain that more pages are not missing.

There is no prologue, so there is no overt statement of intent by which to judge this collection. Despite the title, not many martyrs are included; of the male saints, the two often found in

⁸⁵ Horstmann, *NLA*, p. x.

⁸⁶ This manuscript is currently being edited by Virginia Blanton and Veronica O'Mara, but as the *Life of Edith* and the *Life of Audre of Ely* are important for the purposes of this study, I have included them in Appendix B.

church dedications are placed at the beginning of the manuscript: John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, while Leonard, the last item written in this scribal hand, is a late addition, along with Modwenna.⁸⁷ Thus, it seems as if the manuscript was compiled with the Johns at the beginning, then female saints, and when the scribe found that he (probably) had more space, he looked around for more saints to fill it.

The English *vitae* included are translated (unabridged) from the *Nova Legenda Anglie*, thus indicating an earlier movement to 'English' the larger collection than that found in Pynson's *Kalendre*.⁸⁸ The author of *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres* apparently knows information about these saints beyond that provided in Tynemouth's version, but the point of greatest interest here is that the English saints included in *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres* are only female. Most of the other saints are also women, strongly suggesting a female audience for the manuscript, possibly a nunnery, though lay readership is not excluded.⁸⁹ Pickering suggests that the size of the book, and brevity of some of the lives, also lent itself to use in a women's house.⁹⁰ The English saints included range from Ely, to Whitby, to Thanet, with no easy regional indication, other than the large group of the Ely saints. Most of the popular Anglo-Saxon female saints are represented, although some noticeable ones, such as Frideswide of Oxford and Ælfflæd of Romsey, are missing. Owing to this omission, it was presumably not written for Romsey or any female house in Oxfordshire, nor, indeed, as Blanton has pointed out, Barking.⁹¹ The existence of this manuscript indicates an audience literate in English, if not Latin, who desired to read local saints' *vitae*.

Saints, Nunneries and History

Through these texts, then, the royal nunneries founded in Anglo-Saxon times remained visible to readers of saints' *vitae* well into the Norman period. The *vitae* not only recorded the saints and their lives, but also the interaction between the saints and their communities. By

⁸⁷ Oliver Pickering, 'Saints' Lives', in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. by A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 249-270 (p. 269).

⁸⁸ Pickering, 'Saints' Lives', p. 258.

⁸⁹ See, however, Blanton, 'Literary Production and Nunneries in East Anglia', who suggests a Benedictine or Augustine house in East Anglia.

⁹⁰ Pickering, 'Saints' Lives', p. 258.

⁹¹ Blanton, 'Literary Production and Nunneries in East Anglia'.

Saints, Nunneries, Texts and Contexts

rewriting the *vitae* at different times, both saint and communities were presented as valid and active well into the fifteenth century. Even the collected *vitae*, much less detailed than the commissioned ones, still name the nunneries where the relics of Anglo-Saxon saints rested. Thus, through this process of reiteration, Anglo-Saxon female saints remained relevant to later audiences. The post-Conquest *vitae* illustrate ways of interacting with the past, and are thus valuable tools in the research of women's roles in post-Conquest England.

Chapter II

The Identity of the Saint

And as [Edith] encresid in age, so she encresid in vertues and conyng, oft tymes reding Seyntes lyves. But a-monge all that she radde, she liked best the maydinly and religious lyving of hir awnte Edith in Seynt Modewn-is dayes, which was sister to hir fadir-is brodir and was abbes of Pollisworth in Stafford-shire, lyving there with grete vertues lyving, as this yonge Edith did in Wylton abbey.

(‘Life of St Edith’, *Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*, fol. 70r)

Serge Bonnet describes a saint as

first an extraordinary man inhabited by God. He is also a response to the spiritual needs of a generation. And he is a man who is the eminent illustration of the ideas of sanctity which are held by the Christians of a particular period.¹

André Vauchez, in *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, uses the idea of the saint as ‘a response to the spiritual needs of a generation’ to explain the proliferation of saints, and who was so chosen, in Europe from the thirteenth century.² The saints discussed in this study are women, rather than men, inhabited by God and they were elevated long before the thirteenth century, but they do illustrate the spiritual needs of a generation. The *vitae*, and the saint they depict, are valuable cultural markers for the period in which they were created, providing us with historical sources for people and places otherwise unrecorded.

However, a saint, once elevated, then exists for future generations as well. Saints, as special people of God who have passed on yet remain behind to facilitate communication between God and humankind, cannot die but they can be forgotten. Older saints may need to be re-invented (in both senses of the word), and their *vitae* need to be re-written to keep the saints relevant to society. At the same time, they can be brought up-to-date with new trends in the religion and the society in which they are remembered, as expectations change.

¹ S. Bonnet, *Saint-Rouin, histoire de l'ermitage et du pèlerinage* (Paris, 1956), p.75 – quoted in Vauchez, *Sainthood* p.7.

² Vauchez, *Sainthood*, p. 7.

Identity of the Saint

This may be especially true for local saints, saints who initially belonged to a particular location or group. The personal impact of a saint's presence is beneficial to the church or community as a guardian against outside attacks and as a source of income from pilgrims. The *vitae* of saints such as these might possibly be more prone to being re-written as the community strives to keep their saint relevant to the changing world and the changing expectations of sanctity.

As Ashton has pointed out, 'the intention of a hagiographical text is to confirm the sanctity of its subject, to render visible the saint, "relic" of a wider Christian community'.³ Saints' *vitae*, then, can serve as valuable social history tools in that they reveal the attitudes of the author (and consequently the expected attitude of the audience) towards the saints throughout the period when these saints were important foci of their communities. These attitudes change over time, along with the hopes and expectations of the audience. Therefore, the *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon women associated with certain pre-Conquest foundations give us insights into the communities of women religious, and other groups who read the collections, making it possible to chart changes in the attitudes to the saints until the English Reformation. Distance from the saint in both space and time affected the identity which was depicted.

In looking at the multiple layers of identity readable in a saint's *vita*, the first layer to consider is that of the subject. The saint has (at least) two forms of identity: firstly there is the identification of the saint as a historical person, which is particularly pertinent to this study of founding or patron saints of nunneries. The historical figure of the saint works both to present an Anglo-Saxon past, which is occasionally shown to be Other through the differences in customs, and also to promote the continuity of the community based around her relics. The second identity or characteristic of the saint is that of the holy person. As a religious construct, the saint has set roles which must be fulfilled, and must be seen to continue to be fulfilled, even while the ideas about saints and their roles change. The evolution and development of the saint is therefore a key part of the recording and writing of a saint's *vita*.

³ Ashton, *The Generation of Identity*, p. 158.

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A *vita*, then, can be read for these two aspects of representation. Generically, the *vita* illustrates how the saint conforms to conventional ideas of sanctity. This is the aspect which displays the greatest change over time, as ideas of sanctity develop. The historical aspect, on the other hand, is that which differentiates one saint from all others. While the historical person of the saint is less altered over time, the audience for which the *vita* is intended affects the level of detail which is recorded. *Vitae* intended for the saint's community provide a more complex picture of the saint than those found in larger collections, written for a more general audience. Therefore the different types of sources create different foci for the identity of the saint.

Individual *vitae*, commissioned by the saint's community or by those with a particular reverence for the saint, explore both the historical and the conventional aspects. They act to advertise the power of the saint and elaborate on why she should be honoured, and in what situations she should be invoked. Thus, especially where *translatios* are included, there are plenty of miracles, most noticeably those involving healing. These serve to exhibit the types of miracles which can be expected of the saint, so that petitioners can be assured of her assistance in those areas of need. Where these individual *vitae* were written at the request of the community which houses the saint's relics, the memories of the community are included, along with the explanations of the existence of the secondary relics, the physical articles left behind as visible signs of the life of the person. Elisabeth van Houts describes these mnemonic devices as 'memory pegs', illustrating their role in bearing the weight of memorial.⁴

A *vita* found in a collection of multiple saints' *vitae*, on the other hand, is usually much shorter. It therefore tends to focus more specifically on differentiating a particular saint from the other saints in the collection. As such, the *vita* includes some of the stories based around memory pegs because they provide a distinction from other saints, but there are fewer examples of the more generic healing miracles. Thus, collected *vitae* provide the basic outline

⁴ van Houts, *Memory and Gender*, chapter 5 'Objects as Pegs For Memory', pp. 93-120.

of the lives of a range of saints.

Certain aspects of the identities of Anglo-Saxon female patron or founding saints studied here are consistent with one another. They are generally royal: daughters or sisters of kings, with fathers, mothers or brothers founding or re-founding nunneries and endowing them with land.⁵ After their deaths, these royal saints appear to their successors and demand to be translated, moved to more visible and honourable locations. They perform miracles for the benefit of their communities, and more generally, for a wider community. However, despite their shared narratives (and the exchangeable characteristics of saints in general), these saints are given distinct identities, individual personalities. Their *vitae* are at pains to place them historically and to give them different actions both in life and death. There is a concern to record the saint on the one hand as a plausible person, within limits of holiness, while also displaying their saintliness. This chapter looks at how these often-competing identities are presented in post-Conquest *vitae*.

The Saint as a Historical Person

Each of the *vitae* of the Anglo-Saxon female saints in this thesis opens with a location in the history of the area. The texts give a rough genealogy, linking the saint if not directly to a king, at least to the time of a king. While this plays strongly on the identity of the group or community (as will be seen in chapters IV and V), it also firmly places the saint in a historical time and in relation to outside events, as further proof of the reality of her existence, thereby granting her a historically provable identity. Often the relationship of the saint to other saints, either by blood or in their interactions with the outside world, is detailed, and provides further context for the historical person.

Thus, Goscelin's *Life of Ethelburga* of Barking (*d. c.* 676) opens with mention of her brother in the 'first times of the English church'.⁶ While she herself is not royal, she can claim an even greater relationship. Her brother, Eorcenwald, bishop of London from 675, was a pupil of Mellitus (bishop of London 604-16), who succeeded the greatest of all primates in England,

⁵ See Yorke, *Nunneries*, p.18, for the possible connection of Æthelburh with the East Saxon royal house.

⁶ "primis temporibus [...] Anglicae ecclesiae", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 400.

Identity of the Saint

Augustine, and who was also sent to England by Pope Gregory the Great.⁷ Further to his claims of religious importance, Eorcenwald was ordained by the Greek bishop, Theodore (*d.* 690), who was responsible for organising the early church in England. So while Æthelburh is not recorded here as being of royal blood, she instead has connection to each of the most renowned churchmen of the early English Church. Æthelburh and her brother obviously came from a well-off family, as ‘they converted their earthly rank and ample fortune into a divine and ecclesiastical inheritance’ in the founding of their respective monasteries.⁸

Goscelin’s *Life of Ethelburga* is heavily dependant on Bede, and there is no information in the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* as to the parents of these holy siblings.⁹ Eorcenwald, her brother, was also celebrated as a saint.

Similarly, while Wulfhild of Barking (*d. c.* 990) was not directly royal, she was descended from a junior branch of the royal line, and her family is still one of the first things mentioned by Goscelin. His first chapter in the *Life of St Wulfilda* opens with: ‘[t]he genealogy of the virgin which is to be related is narrated thus by ancient writers.’¹⁰ Wulfhild’s great-grandfather was discovered as a child in a tree by King Alfred (*r.* 871-99) who then raised him to a noble rank, giving ‘Nestling’ a wife and riches. Her grandfather was also a worthy man, while Wulfhild herself was begotten after her parents had lived chaste for 18 years and were then instructed in a vision that they should ‘come together [...] so that the spouse of Christ might be born out of celibacy’.¹¹ So Wulfhild’s ancestors are connected to King Alfred, while she herself is given an almost miraculous birth from two very holy parents. In the second chapter, she is then located more firmly in her own period of history by her connection to King Edgar (*r.* 959-75), renowned even after the Conquest for his reformation of the English church in conjunction with Bishop Æthelwold. Edgar sought to take Wulfhild as a wife, having seen her in the convent, but she miraculously escaped his rather persistent attentions.

⁷ Colker, ‘Jocelyn of Canterbury’, pp. 400-401.

⁸ “*terrenam dignitatem et ampla patrimonia in diuinam et ecclesiasticam hereditatem transtulere*”, Colker, ‘Jocelyn of Canterbury’, p. 401.

⁹ Bede, *HE*, iv: 6-10, pp. 354-365.

¹⁰ “*Genealogia expondae uirginis sic retextitur ab antiquis*”, Colker, ‘Jocelyn of Canterbury’, p. 419.

¹¹ “*conuenirent [...] ut iam castiori aeuo sponsam Christi generarent*”. Colker, ‘Jocelyn of Canterbury’, p. 420.

Identity of the Saint

Edith of Wilton (c. 963-84) is even more closely connected to Edgar, being one of his holy children. Goscelin's *Legend of Edith* commences with a brief portrait of her father as 'the most pure flower of his royal ancestors', and Archbishop Dunstan is noted as having received a message from God at the time of Edgar's birth 'which announced peace to the English, who had so long been afflicted'. At the same time, Edith's mother, Wulfthryth was 'known to be blessed, a descendant of princes and a nobly-born child of a royal duke'.¹² Wulfthryth is, also, Wulfhild of Barking's older sister. Thus both of Edith's parents are set apart as being good and noble, and she is further marked for sanctity by the ray of light which shone from her head at the time of her birth, a convention which also shows up in other saints' *vitae*.¹³

Goscelin goes on to provide a sense of Edith as a person based on the use of physical description:

Her appearance was more like her father, her sense of reverence more like her mother. She was of well-proportioned medium height, which she reached before she was an adult. Her holy modesty and the snow-white bird of Christ had given those stars, her eyes – which shone from her inner radiance – the likeness of doves' eyes. [...] Her mother did not desire to load her reddish hair with gold, nor to obscure the stronghold of the cross with a gold plate or jewels hanging over her forehead.¹⁴

While these descriptions may appear somewhat formulaic, similar to the form which might be found in a much later romance – well-proportioned, dove-grey eyes, reddish hair, and a high forehead – they are very unusual for the time. The historical person of Edith is further emphasised by her choice of clothing, which provides a glimpse into the dual nature of a royal nun:

The senior nuns who knew about it testify that she was afflicted by a hair-shirt which gave a false appearance of inner delicacy by a purple exterior, although the observance of the rule would have required black.¹⁵

¹² Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 26.

¹³ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 27.

¹⁴ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 31-2

¹⁵ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 38.

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Edith is also presented as an educated woman. Not only does her father bring in foreigners to teach her – Radbodo of Rheims and Benno of Trier – but she is also shown as being eager for instruction: ‘in place of a range of adornments she preferred to adorn her with the splendour of learning by which she might gleam more brightly to the adornment of the Church’.¹⁶ As further proof of this learning, the *Legend of Edith* points to the ‘manual of her devotions’ kept at Wilton, containing prayers written in her own hand. However, the version dedicated to Lanfranc omits this passage, and instead mentions her avid reading of saints’ *vitae*, especially that of her aunt, Edith of Tamworth.¹⁷ Education, then, is provided in part by her father, as something suitable for the daughter of a king, but is also shown as being an integral part of monastic life with the writing of prayers and the reading of saints’ *vitae*. At the same time, Goscelin’s direct contact with the nuns at Wilton provided a more personal description of Edith as a person known and familiar to the community than most hagiographies. Her identity was firmly fixed in the minds of the intended audience.

The *Nova Legenda Anglie* and *Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres* also open with Edith’s parents, but only in a passing reference. Her mother is given greater importance, owing to her choice to retire to Wilton:

as sone as saynt Edith was borne, she made hir selfe a nonne of Wilton abbey and at laste was abbes ther made by seynt Ethelwolde, bisshop of Wynchestre, and encresid vertuously and goode ensample yaf to all hir convent. (fol.69v)

This connects Edith and her mother with Saint Æthelwold, another important Anglo-Saxon churchman of the period, while Goscelin’s *vita* instead emphasises the connection with St Dunstan.

The *Wilton Chronicle*, based on Goscelin’s *Legend of Edith* with substantial revisions, builds up a sense of Edith’s place in history and her royal and saintly lineage more than the other *vitae* discussed here. As part of the addition to Goscelin’s *Legend*, the opening lines of the *Chronicle* give not only Edith’s immediate family history, but also a brief history of England

¹⁶ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 32.

¹⁷ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 34-5.

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from the time of the Seven Kingdoms. The rise of Wessex is traced, and the founding of Wilton is inextricably tied to the Wessex royal family (ll. 1-789). From Egbert, each of the kings of Wessex is described as a founder or patron of Wilton, so that the fortunes of the kingdom and the nunnery are tied together. Even where a king is not depicted as a good man, if he gave money or lands to Wilton, he is listed as one of the founders. Thus Æthelbald, who 'wedded Judyth, þat was his fader wyffe, / Wherefore alle thyng felle to hym amys' (ll. 238-9), is later listed as 'þe thryd founder' (l. 361), after Egbert and Æthelwolf.

Having recreated a historical past, the *Wilton Chronicle* narrative of Edith's *vita* then starts with the birth of her father, and contains many elements of a courtly romance. Echoing Goscelin, it records that at the time of Edgar's birth, Dunstan was told by an angel:

'Now may Englonde be glad and mery!
For rest and pese shalle þerinne be
By alle þis kyngys tyme y-wys,
and holy leuyng in prosperite' (ll. 805-9).

King Edgar grows in goodness, if not in stature, and when the king of Scotland (unnamed in the *Wilton Chronicle*) makes fun of his height, Edgar's response is to challenge him to a duel in a private wood. However, the king of Scotland is 'alla-baysshette' and begs forgiveness (ll.817-80). The romance then continues with King Edgar falling asleep by the edge of a forest and having a dream which is subsequently interpreted by his mother, which tells of the children he will have, Edith's half-brothers being represented as apples, while Edith is shown as a lamp (ll. 882-965).¹⁸

Soon after this, Edgar goes to Wilton, where he hears Wulfthryth reading at dinner, and

An angelys voys hym thouȝt hit was:
And loke vp þat mayden vpone,
& for alle here veyle he seyȝe here face –

¹⁸ The same material is covered in Malmesbury, *GRA*, II: 148, pp. 238-241, II: 154, pp. 250-257. However, there the order is Dunstan's vision of peace in Edgar's time; Edgar's dream interpreted by his mother, and the Scottish king laughing at Edgar's stature. The rearrangement by the *Wilton Chronicle* author allows the narrative to progress from Edgar's birth, proof of his nobility, the dream and its interpretation into Edgar's meeting with Wulfthryth, which ends in the birth of Edith.

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A feyrer hym thouȝt he sawe neuer none. (ll. 1014-7).

Having fallen in love at first sight, Edgar finds out that Wulfthryth's family are noble, and that 'forsothe y-sacryd he nysnot ȝet' (l. 1030).¹⁹ Unfortunately, someone has edited or censored the text, as there is a quire missing at this point in the manuscript, right where the story becomes most interesting.²⁰ Perhaps a later reader did not appreciate the very human beginnings of Edith's life, as the tale resumes – in mid verse – as a more recognisable saint's *vita* with Wulfthryth back in the convent. Despite, or perhaps because of, this shift to the romantic, the effect of the opening of the *Wilton Chronicle* is to firmly place Edith in a historical place and time, with parents and grandparents who are not only royal, but also holy.

As with Edith, there are a range of texts which contain versions of the life of Eadburh of Nunnaminster (d. 960). Osbert's twelfth-century *Vita Edburge* places some emphasis on King Alfred, whose granddaughter she was. Like Wilton in the *Wilton Chronicle*, the founding of Nunnaminster is closely tied to the royal grandparents: while Alfred 'began an new monastery at Winchester [...] his royal consort, Ealswith, rivalled him [...] in that she provided for the sanctity of holy virgins with fortunate auspices'.²¹ The monasteries were finished by their son, Edward the Elder, and his 'excellent queen', and Nunnaminster was completed more fully by the dedication of Eadburh there, thus fulfilling the auspices of her grandparents.

The MS Lansdowne 436 version of Eadburh's *vita* similarly goes back to Alfred and Ealswith's founding of Nunnaminster, and its subsequent completion by Edward the Elder,

¹⁹ "She has not yet taken her vows" – this text is in the Wiltshire dialect, which had not yet adopted "she".

²⁰ It is worth speculating whether there was a very deliberate reason as to why this quire, of all of them, has been removed. The removal from the nunnery of a novice, even one unprofessed, is not the sort of thing which would have been encouraged, especially not if the text was written for reading in the abbey. It may be that at the time it was written, it was perfectly acceptable to the audience, but a later abbess might have taken exception to it and so removed that quire. It was unfortunate that the birth of Edith also occurred in that quire, but that holy event was sacrificed to save other women from falling into the trap of marriage. On the other hand, it could be that someone was so touched by the romance that they removed the quire to keep it by their side, to re-read it at will.

²¹ "*nouum Wintonie incepit monasterium [...] Emulata est etiam regia coniunx Alhswiða [...] ut sacrarum uirginum felicibus auspiciis prouideret sanctimonie*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 255-308, p. 264.

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but the *Pershore Miraculae* in British Library MS, Harley 64, only mentions her father Edward. The first of these manuscripts is a collection of many English saints' *vitae*, while the second is a compilation made expressly for Pershore, which includes other accounts of Eadburh's life, including that of William of Malmesbury, so the compiler probably did not feel it necessary to go into the details of her ancestry again.²²

The version of Eadburh's *vita* in the *South English Legendary*, however, follows a similar course to the *Wilton Chronicle*. Having stated that King Edward was Eadburh's father, the *South English Legendary* then traces the four 'kinges of þis lond' who were named Edward, and how St Eadburh's father was the son of Alfred, the first English king to have been anointed in Rome.²³ This acknowledges the distance in time from Eadburh's period to the time current to the *South English Legendary* and its audience, while also indicating a continuation of the kingship of England into Norman times.

In contrast to Edith and Eadburh, the only remaining text we have containing the *vita* of St Ælfflæd of Romsey (c. 960 – c. 1016) is found in MS Lansdowne 436. It opens 'during the reign of Edgar', and ties Ælfflæd to Edgar's third wife 'Elfrida' (Ælfthryth). Later tradition elaborates on the relationship, making Ælfflæd the step-daughter of the queen.²⁴ So the connection to royalty is present, and the child was closely guarded by Edgar and his wife after the death of her parents. Ælfflæd is also provided with a holy birth, which was possibly modelled on that of Edith: 'before the birth of her last daughter, in sign that she should be a child of light and worthy of God, the mother saw in a dream a ray of the glorious sun break forth above her head'.²⁵ Thus, even in a collection of *vitae*, Ælfflæd is depicted as being closely connected to the royal family, and placed in her time in history.

The identities of the saints are thus closely connected to their existence in historical time and the saintliness of their relatives by both blood and marriage. Each of the saints discussed

²² Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 28, n. 64.

²³ Braswell, 'Saint Edburga of Winchester', p. 325.

²⁴ Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, pp. 16-18.

²⁵ Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, p.19.

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here are connected to royal or holy people, characters who would have been familiar to a range of audiences. This serves to identify the saints with an Anglo-Saxon past, and provide markers as to their roles in the wider society. In the commissioned works, those with more detail as to the genealogies of the saints, the communities' histories are also validated and linked to important people and historical events through the lives of the saints. This serves to further reinforce both the significance of the communities, in that they have noble founders and ancient traditions, and of the saints, in that they provide these links to the past.

That the saints remembered in the religious communities all had royal connections suggests two important social concepts. The first is the obvious one of the role of royal women within these foundations. The abbesses of the early nunneries were most often members of the royal family, or junior branches thereof. By having connections in high places, the establishments were better able to gain the funds needed to keep going, especially as these female religious houses often had trouble with their income. The placement of royal women as abbess was probably not simply a result of nepotism, however. They would have been more likely to have been trained in some sort of leadership role, even if the training was undertaken in the nunnery itself. Wealth and power beget further wealth and power. The second social effect is closely related to this first one. It was the royally-established nunneries which survived the Conquest, those who were richly endowed. This meant that the communities had greater resources to cope with changing circumstances, but also that those communities which were better off were able to attract members from the upper social echelons, thus further supplying them with funds for the future. Thus, communities with royal founders, and more importantly, royal saints, would have worked to capitalise on the identities of their saints.

The Saint as a Holy Person

Noble birth and holy parents are not enough to make a saint, however. Two particular concerns are evident in the *vitae* as the identification of the saints. The first is to elevate her above other mortals, illustrating her role as intermediary between God and the people. The second concern is to distinguish the saint from the crowd of other saints, an issue which is especially important for the Anglo-Saxon female saints, most of whom were royal, related to one another, and with very similar names. Thus, the episodes surrounding a saint's choice of

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the monastic life, and the works, both good and miraculous, are important indicators as to the kind of person the saint was. Records of what she was remembered to have said are vital in differentiating her, as, too, are the explanations of the origins of secondary relics, the visible evidence of the physical existence of the saint. These most often show up in *vitae* written for communities, for those who have close connections with the saint. Thus a *vita* is heavily influenced by the saint's membership of a community during her life and the community's possession of her relics after her death.

On the other hand, many episodes in an Anglo-Saxon saint's *vita* appear to be interchangeable with some of the other saints' *vitae*. As such, these are of less importance to compilers of large collections, as space restrictions limit the usefulness of repeated events. Instead, the *vitae* in the collections focus on the episodes which are characteristic of that saint, greatly abbreviating other events so as to make those essential items stand out.

Writing at such a distance from Æthelburh's own time, Goscelin appears to have had some trouble in finding specific instances of the saint's actions in life beyond those recorded by Bede.²⁶ The second chapter of his *Life of St Ethelburga* covers much of her time as abbess of the monastery of Barking, where she strove to be an example and a teacher to the virgins who flocked to her instruction. However, his depiction of the abbess diverges from that of Bede in the role which Æthelburh takes in teaching. Bede stresses Eorcenwald's role in establishing 'an excellent form of monastic Rule and discipline in both [houses]', and points to Æthelburh's more practical 'sound and devoted care for those who were under her rule'.²⁷ Goscelin, however, depicts the sister as a skilled teacher, passing on to her students what she learnt 'from her brother's mouth or from sacred reading', and improving it with her own insight, 'so that the worthy daughters presented the likeness of their worthy mother in the life-giving face of sanctity'.²⁸

²⁶ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 391.

²⁷ Bede, *HE*, iv: 6-7, pp. 354-57.

²⁸ "*Quicquid apostolicae doctrinae de fraterno ore uel de deuina conceperat lectione altus uisceribus caritatus mellificabat ipsis pignoribus parturitionis suae, unde dignam matrem dignae filiae assimilabant genitiua sanctitatis facie*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 402.

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This image of the abbess as spiritual teacher is possibly the result of information or impressions from Goscelin's personal interactions with the community during his sojourn at Barking in 1087, whereas Bede was reliant on a 'little book'.²⁹ Goscelin had seen Barking for himself, and his work emphasises Æthelburh's independence from her brother in teaching the nuns under her care. Nevertheless, Goscelin's material is based either on the chapters in Bede, or on Bede's source. A miraculous revelation of where to bury the dead when a plague sweeps through the nunnery is one of the few miracles directly attributed to Æthelburh.³⁰ The other episodes included in her *vita* mostly involve other people, such as the young boy who calls a nun to accompany him in death.³¹ The holiness of those surrounding Æthelburh, especially of those under her tuition, is seen as an indication of her great influence. Her own death is accompanied by signs of holiness, also, as will be seen below.

In contrast, Goscelin's *Life of Wulfhild* benefits from the input of people who knew her and those around her, as the prologue states that it is based on the oral report of members of her community along with some written sources. Owing to the proximity in time between Wulfhild's life and Goscelin's recording of it, there are more actual examples from her life included in the text, and greater detail given for those than remain in Æthelburh's *vita*. Thus, her encounter with and escape from Edgar, who desires her when he sees her in Wilton, provide enough material for three chapters, which was all that Æthelburh received for her whole life.³² There are more details about other people involved, such as the role played by her aunt in the attempted abduction. Wulfhild's aunt, Wenflæd, is apparently motivated by a desire to be related to the king by marriage and, in pursuit of her ends, is willing to trick the girl. Wulfhild, though allowing herself to be dressed 'in the splendour of golden robes', reject the idea of great power, of being 'queen and mistress of the realm of Britain'.³³ She protests silently, but also uses pretence to get away: feigning sickness to be excused from the

²⁹ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 387; "*libellus*", Bede, *HE*, iv: 10,11, pp. 364-65.

³⁰ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 404-5; compare Bede, *HE*, iv: 7, pp. 356-59.

³¹ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 405.

³² See also Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 390.

³³ "*auratarum uestium decore radians adducitur*", "*regina et domina rerum Britanniae prelibatur*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 420-421.

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feast, she was at last allowed to leave the hall.³⁴

Her escape through the privy drain is apologised for by the hagiographer, who would prefer to write about lilies than dirt, but it provides him with a chance to further praise the saint:

Most glorious is that filth by which immaculate virginity was freed. To the pure, everything is pure, and other people's dirt illuminates and does not pollute the friend of chastity.³⁵

There are particulars given of the removal of her rich clothes and jewels, and of her two handmaidens who help her get out and find her way to the house of a poor woman, where she 'was given hospitality as a beggar in that very town of Wherwell'.³⁶

Thus Wulfhild is given a personality: she is someone who prefers filth and virginity to riches and a king for a husband. She is happier in the humble cottage of a servant than being feasted royally. She rewards those who helped her escape, and returns to Wilton. That is not the end of Edgar's chase, however:

When the king, the winged lover, learnt of [Wulfhild's return to Wilton], laying aside the concerns of his kingdom, he flew to Wilton again, and sought the virgin with all implements of capture.³⁷

The king eventually comes to his senses when he lays hold of her sleeve as she runs from the cloister into the church and the sleeve falls away with no sign of ripping. This causes him to finally realise what he is doing, and worse, where he is doing it: 'Trembling, he considered what this tearing might mean; in wisdom he understood that the spouse of the Lord had been cut off from his desire'.³⁸ Here the effect of oral history can be seen more clearly than in any of Goscelin's other works considered in this study. The details and the drama in the

³⁴ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 421.

³⁵ "*Gloriosissima est ista feditis qua liberata est immaculata uirginitas. Omnia munda mundis et alienae sordes clarificant non polluunt castitatis amicam*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 421.

³⁶ "*in eadam uilla Vuaruuella nocte illa ut mendica hospitata est*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 422.

³⁷ "*Hoc ubi rex aliger amator comperit, postpositus regni negociis, Vulitoniam reuolauit, omnibus capturae instrumentis uirginem impetit*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 422.

³⁸ "*uoluebat tremens quid portenderet hec scissura, intellexitque prudens quod a suo appetitu sponsa Domini esset abscisa*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 423.

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tricking of the saint, her escape, and the king's chase into Wilton are vivid, and while Goscelin does add references to other saints and to legends, Wulfhild's story is clearly visible.

Other episodes in her life are also recorded: she is concerned not only for the nuns under her care, but also the poor; she performs the menial chores alongside the servants.³⁹ When she hosts Bishop Æthelwold, on his way to visit King Edgar, the wine miraculously does not run out, as curious servants note.⁴⁰ The height of her humility is depicted by her interaction with Queen Ælfthryth, the mother of King Æthelred, who has her thrown out of Barking. Wulfhild declares that she will return, but otherwise makes no protest in the text. After St Æthelburh appears to the queen mother in a vision, dressed in rags, and convinces her that her illness is the result of her actions against the abbess, Ælfthryth repents. At this point, Wulfhild appears to forgive readily, as Queen Ælfthryth rapidly recovers her health.⁴¹ Wulfhild's determined evasion of King Edgar sets the scene for her life, and all the subsequent episodes recorded by Goscelin continue to show a humble yet determined person, who has committed her life to serving God and other people.

Goscelin's *Legend of Edith*, while also based on the recollections and oral traditions relating to a historical person, was probably further informed in the rounding out of her character by Goscelin's interactions with Eve, a nun from Wilton with whom he had a close relationship, and for whom he wrote the *Liber Confortatorius* once Eve had left Wilton for the Continent and a life of greater seclusion.⁴² Thus Edith is presented in his text as a contemplative, composing prayers and longing for her heavenly bride-groom, while at the same time she is portrayed as taking part in her father's court and wearing the royal purple.⁴³ In part this contrast is a product of the need to balance the idea of a saint with the stories currently circulating in the nunnery, but it also illustrates Stephanie Hollis' argument that 'St Edith is an emblematically transitional figure', moving between the court and the monastic community of Wilton, and able to exercise power in both. After the Benedictine Reformation,

³⁹ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 424-5.

⁴⁰ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 425-6.

⁴¹ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 428-9.

⁴² Hollis, 'Introduction' in *Writing the Wilton Women*, pp. 4-5. See also 'Edith as Contemplative', pp. 291-306.

⁴³ See Hollis, 'Edith as Contemplative and Bride of Christ', pp. 281-306, esp. pp. 291-306.

the literary focus on holy women shifted from abbesses to queens.⁴⁴

Edith's saintliness does not rely solely on her having been chosen from birth. She is also shown to exercise her own will, by choosing the monastic life at the age of two. She is offered the choice between 'royal dignity and women's ambition' of her father's world on the one hand, and 'her mother's faith' on the other. Goscelin describes the scene as being 'like a market-place selling varied merchandise, like a wonder-cabinet of divine and secular objects, like varied delights to please human eyes and minds'.⁴⁵ The wonder of a child choosing the black veil over the gold, purple and jewels is further confirmed by the course of the rest of her life, but the significance of Edith's choice is emphasised by Goscelin's scriptural references, connecting this sort of test to biblical precedents.⁴⁶ Edith is then 'offered to the Saviour', along with the psalter and 'augmented pastures' as a bridal gift. Goscelin thus presents Edith as betrothed to Christ from a very young age, and so all her actions henceforth are to be seen as part of her pursuit of her bridegroom.⁴⁷

Traditionally, saints were martyrs, or those who had suffered for their faith.⁴⁸ Growing up in a Christian culture, Edith was not persecuted for her faith directly, but instead is shown to withstand the temptation of worldly wealth and power that could have been hers. She stands out from the other noble women in Wilton, but teaches them humility through her example.⁴⁹ Tensions between the role of princess and that of nun are also revealed:

the glorious virgin's struggles with the flattery of the world and the evidence of her virtues gave her new, more brilliant accolades for humility. [...] Foreign kingdoms and principalities also gave her respect with greetings, letters and gifts; religious leaders begged her to act as a saving intercessor. Whatever ambassadors Gaul or Germany, the august and apostolic city of Rome or emperors themselves had sent to the most renowned prince Edgar, they took pride in commending themselves to her holy kindness. Who could escape so great a net?⁵⁰

⁴⁴Hollis, 'Introduction', p. 8

⁴⁵ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 28.

⁴⁶ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 28-9

⁴⁷ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Vauchez, *Sainthood*, pp. 14-5.

⁴⁹ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 37-8.

⁵⁰ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 39.

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On the death of her brother, King Edward, Edith was offered the throne of England, but she refused to leave Wilton. Despite the honours given to her, Edith is shown as caring more for the sick and the deformed, in a phrase that is repeated or echoed in all of the subsequent versions of her Life: 'The more anyone appeared to her deformed by disease, the more she offered herself to that person with empathy and kindness, full of service.'⁵¹ She tends to the sick and the poor, rather than consort with royalty and riches.

Unsurprisingly, the *Wilton Chronicle* reveals a very similar image of Edith and her life in the convent. The first time that Edith makes an appearance in this text – after the missing quire which would have described her birth and choice of holy life – she is already rather saintly:

And bedon here loue entyerlyche god aboue
& all crystone creaturis for his loue, bothe more & lesse.
Pey tau3tone Woltrud here moder also,
Pat was euermore þat mayde by
& toke ry3t gode hede þerto
& lyff euer full vertuosely.
Pis was þe gouernyl pey token hem to,
Pe moder & þe dou3ter y-fere.
3et was þe dou3ter þe parfitor of hem two,
3yff ony of hem parfitor were. (ll. 1031-40)

She busies herself with seeking the kingdom of God and, in a direct echo of Goscelin, serves

hure sustren with alle mekenes,
as was Martha or Mary in herre seruyng
to Jhesu goddis sone, kyng of grace. (ll. 1054-56)

While she might be serving others, this text also depicts her as a royal personage. As such, dukes, earls and barons 'putten hem-self vnder here subiectione' (l. 1079). There are some divergences from Goscelin's version: for example, the *Wilton Chronicle* states that Edith could have been queen of France, instead of England. However, as in the *Legend*, Edith is given plenty of opportunity to become proud; being courted and deferred to by many powerful men, and even receiving a letter from the pope. Instead, she was more mindful of the poor,

⁵¹ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 39.

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and more likely to plead the case of the criminal than try to aid a baron (ll. 1077-120). Thus, the saint is shown as rising above the temptations of this world, and proving herself worthy of a higher kingdom.

The detailed description given of Edith in the *Chronicle* departs from Goscelin's account by focusing more on her skills than her appearance. She has, like her mother, a beautiful voice; she can write, paint (or draw – 'purtrey' l. 1158), and embroider with silk, making many church vestments but nothing of a worldly nature. She can play the harp and carve images. However, she lives humbly enough, taking penance upon herself, and preferring to read and sing from her book, to fast and pray. When she does sleep, it was not on her royal bed, but on a hard board. She wears a hair shirt next to her skin, under more royal garments, which latter then leads to Æthelwold's criticism of her. The interaction with Æthelwold is fuller than that found in Goscelin: in response to Æthelwold saying 'þat he herde neuer of non / þat went to Paradys one þat aray' (ll. 1203-4), Edith is given the first of her speeches, lecturing the bishop on how

Jhesu, [...] þat vs dere bouzt,
Take not only hede to monnys clothyng,
Bot also to bothe his hert & þouzt
& also to his gode worchyng. (ll.1217-20).

The bishop goes away, thanking God for the wisdom found in this girl, in that she could express this principle of spiritual understanding.

Edith's holiness, as depicted in these two main texts, is largely based on her deliberate choice of the nunnery at a very young age, followed by her continued rejection of temptations offered by the pleasures and riches of this world.

Osbert's *Vita Edburge* was written after Goscelin's *Legend of Edith*, which might explain why the scene of the infant's miraculous choice of monastic life in the Osbert's work echoes that in Goscelin's:

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The king ordered that royal garments should be laid out on one side and ecclesiastical ornaments should be heaped up on the other side, including the text of the Gospels, and the paten and chalice, and he ordered that the child should be brought to stand close by them. [...] When the child cast her eyes upon these things while he was standing by, she did not handle the feminine adornments, but taught by the Holy Spirit, chose the sacraments of the church.⁵²

Thus Eadburh's monastic life began early, and although, like Edith, there was some tension between that vocation and her royal inheritance, she showed patience and humility. The purple garment which she had worn when a child was hung as an offering by the altar at festivals, a visible sign of relinquished royalty. 'And although she was in her birth above others, she made herself inferior to everyone by exercising obedience towards them'.⁵³ Part of the humility which she demonstrated appears to have taken the form of accepting punishment which the other girls would have received. In the process, the text reveals elements of the culture's views on social status. Osbert writes of her having been beaten twice, and both times the senior nuns beg forgiveness, not for having hit her, but for not recognising her, and so hitting her.⁵⁴ A similar concern as to how one should treat a royal nun is seen in the anxiety which the nunnery had over Eadburh's secret shoe-cleaning. Once it was discovered who had been taking the shoes at night,

Then the royal offspring was summoned before the holy congregation and was addressed by each of them about this business and was reproved by public correction that she should come to her senses. 'Is it fitting,' they said, 'that a king's child should bow her neck to such a low form of servitude, and perform the work of a low-born slave, and do what brings disgrace on the dignity of her famous family?'⁵⁵

This is followed by their worry about how to tell the king, her father, that she has been cleaning shoes, though Edward the Elder appears to have received this news happily, as

⁵² "Imperat igitur rex hinc indumenta consterni regalia, illinc ecclesiastica componi citius ornamenta, textum videlicet euangulicum, et patenam et calicem, secusque consistere precepit infantum. [...] Que coniectus infans oculis cum presens attenderet, omisit instrumenta attricare feminea, ecclesiastica per Spiritum Sanctum edocta discernere sacramenta", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 265.

⁵³ "Et cum sullimior ceteris esset ex genere, inferiorum cunctis se reddebat obsequii dignatione", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 266.

⁵⁴ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 267-8.

⁵⁵ "Accersitur deinde proles regia in congregatione sancta, et super huiusmodi negotio a singulis conuenitur, et publica correctione ut respiscat arguitur. 'Dedecet', inquiunt, 'ut ad tam demisse seruitutis obsequium inclinet ceruicem genus regium, et opus aggrediatur uilis mancipii, faciatque preiudicium preclari germinis dignitati'", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 268.

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further proof of the holiness of his child.⁵⁶

Like the other saints discussed here, Eadburh displays generosity and mercy to those less well-off. Osbert records that 'she was so completely suffused with the odour of the works of charity that she ministered to the needs of Christ's poor', and when there was not enough money to give to the thirty poor daily, 'necessity drove her to use her family's goods'.⁵⁷ Like the other saints,

She gave clothing to those who felt cold, gentle care to the weak, food to the hungry; she hastened with remedies to those who were parched by thirst. Those who were condemned to punishment in the cell of a prison the virgin relieved with her comfort, and health in beautiful form flowed out gently from her fragrance towards the sick.⁵⁸

While this echo of Matthew 25:35-6 appears in most of the longer or individual *vitae* of all the saints – as a formula which it was expected saints would follow – each of the texts also provides examples of how the individual saint performed these actions, as Osbert here explains that 'it was permitted, at that time to women living under religious vows to have an abundance of their own property'.⁵⁹ The hagiographer displays an awareness of the differences over time in the expectations of both nuns and saints.

On the other hand, the *South English Legendary*, being much shorter than Osbert's work, clearly illustrates the essentialising of a *vita* into a collection. It includes Eadburh's choice of a religious life at age three, and the secret cleaning of the nuns' shoes, without any mention of the concern for what the King might say. While her devotion to prayer is mentioned, there is nothing about her winning an estate for the nunnery, or even spending her own money to feed the poor. The concerns of the nunnery are of less importance to this text as it is disconnected from the community.

⁵⁶ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 269.

⁵⁷ "*misericordie operibus ita tota redolet, ut Christi pauperibus necessaria ministret*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 274-5.

⁵⁸ "*Argentibus amictum, infirmis obsequium, dapes prebet famelicis, occurrit cum remedio defectui sitientis. Dampnatos supplicii in ergastulo carceris, suo releuat uirgo solatio, et ex odoris fragrantia suauiter emanat egrotis sospitas in munde*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 275.

⁵⁹ "*Licebat tunc temporis sanctimonialibus feminis, in eodem loco peculiaribus rerum abundare copiis*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 275.

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Interestingly, the *vita* of Eadburh found in MS Lansdowne 436 does not include the child's choice, but instead focuses in the first two chapters on her holy living. The first chapter deals with her personal life, stating that the child, once committed to the care of the abbess Æthelthryth, grew in grace and learning, reciting psalms and writing seven hymns a day.⁶⁰ The second chapter addresses her interactions with other people – in particular her showing mercy to those in need, feeding thirty paupers a day, clothing the naked and feeding the sick.⁶¹ The text appears to be more exemplary than marvellous, focusing on the ascetic aspect of Eadburh's sanctity.

In the same manuscript, Ælfflæd of Romsey is described growing under the guidance of Abbess Maerwyn as a loving daughter, and the two of them encourage one another to holiness. Ælfflæd is similarly praised for her kindness to the poor. Her care of them came at the expense of her own food:

And that she might hide her saintliness and be able to help the destitute, she pretended at table among her companions to drink when she did not drink, and to eat when she did not eat, hiding in her sleeves the food which she was intending on bestowing upon the poor.⁶²

Later, when she is abbess herself, Ælfflæd finds herself in some trouble over her generosity, as she spends rents which have been collected by the bailiff. However, this allows God to reveal his approval through a miracle, returning all the money to the coffer.⁶³ Thus MS Lansdowne 436 appears to stress holy living and concern for the poor as central to the idea of sanctity.

The individuality of the saints portrayed here is bounded by the conventionalities of sanctity. Thus, while Edith and Eadburh show remarkable foresight in choosing the veil at a tender age, much of the information we are given about the daily lives of the saints is to do with

⁶⁰ Braswell, 'Saint Edburga', p. 330.

⁶¹ Braswell, 'Saint Edburga', p. 330.

⁶² Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, p. 20.

⁶³ Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, p. 23-5.

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their interactions with others. The customary signs of holiness in reading and praying display an inner holiness, while their kindness to the poor is a representation of their devotion to Christ. While this last is an archetype of Christian living, and so to be expected, the stress placed on this, and on showing mercy to those convicted of crimes, also appears to provide a connection between the virgin abbess, mother to her nuns, and the Virgin Mother of God. This is further emphasised in the wording of many of the texts, but it is perplexing to find only echoes and no direct likening to Mary. Since the Virgin was seen as being so much higher than normal saints,⁶⁴ perhaps they are not to be compared to her, but as the saints are considered to be brides of Christ, this omission seems strange. Wulfhild, especially, as one who had escaped marriage, is described in Goscelin's *Life of St Wulfilda* as both 'glorious mother' and 'blessed virgin' in the opening sentences of a chapter.⁶⁵ These phrases, occurring so close together, could not have failed to attract the attention of the audience to the similarity between the abbess and the Blessed Virgin. Thus, while the identities of saints share many attributes, there is room within *vitae* to attempt to portray the individuals as slightly different from one another.

Holiness in Death

The account of a saint's death is intended to be exemplary and plays an important part in their marking for sanctity. The Anglo-Saxon female saints' death-scenes all follow a very similar *typos*. In each case, the saint has foreknowledge of her own death, or a warning from someone close to her.⁶⁶ There are multiple witnesses to the death of the saint, who will give evidence as to the holy way that she faced her end, and to any miracles which occurred at the time. The saint is initially buried in a place of her choosing, in a humble, obscure grave. Later, many of the saints demand their translations to somewhere more honourable, usually through visions, occasionally with accompanying signs, which are interpreted as an instruction for translation. The translations themselves, particularly of the saints from the tenth century, are attended by important people, kings and prelates. In the twelfth century,

⁶⁴ For reasons why Mary is superior to other saints, see, for example, John Damascene, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, IV: 16.

⁶⁵ "gloriosa mater", "beata uirgo", in Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 428.

⁶⁶ This prediction (although common generally to saints) appears to be an extension of the belief that Germanic women have prescience, as recorded by Tacitus. *Tacitus on Britain and Germany*, trans. by H. Mattingly (West Drayton: Penguin, 1948), "Germania", Ch 8, p. 107.

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as the Church tightened control over the acts of beatification, there was a shift from the importance of attending kings to that of attending bishops. Miracles occur at the translation, proving the sanctity of the dead. However, the lack of variation in the death scenes means that the representation of saint's death is not as important in the collections of *vitae*.

Thus, Æthelburh's death is foretold by another of the nuns of Barking, Torhtgyth, who is also very holy, and has been 'tested' by God with illness for nine years 'so that her virtue might be perfected in infirmity'. Torhtgyth has a vision of a bright body being drawn up to heaven by gold ropes, and understands that a 'soul worthy of God [...] would be drawn up to heaven as if by golden cords'. This is then confirmed by Æthelburh's 'migrating to the heavenly kingdom'.⁶⁷ Goscelin then goes back to describe Æthelburh's death in more detail, explaining that

it would be good to narrate a little more fully her holy and pious departing from her so holy life, lest we should seem to those who love her to be passing over it rather than describing it.⁶⁸

The abbess is surrounded by her sorrowing nuns, who, though all aware that they 'ought rather to rejoice in the happiness of their mother, [...] wept for their earthly loss, [even as] they expressed joy for the citizen who had been taken up into heaven'.⁶⁹

Æthelburh, on the other hand, faces death as freedom from this earthly life and 'poured forth her glorious soul to the joys of her Lord'.⁷⁰ Thus she is witnessed by the nuns as being prepared for death, and the vision of Torhtgyth reassures them that Æthelburh is going to heaven, where 'from her lofty bridal chamber [she] has the power to confer more immediate help to the earth'.⁷¹ As a clear sign of her power, another woman, who had been sick for a long time, prays that she might be released and 'was led to the kingdom from her ruinous

⁶⁷ "*migrens ad caelestia regna*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 407-8.

⁶⁸ "*Sed ipsius tam sanctae vitae sanctum piisque obitum iuuat paulo clarius retexere ne uideamur amantibus hunc transilisse potius quam exposuisse*" Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 408.

⁶⁹ "*et quamuis exultandum magis crederent de materna felicitate [...] Lacrimantur terrigenae suam desolationem, gratulantur caelicolae sibi susceptum ciuem*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 408.

⁷⁰ "*animam effudit in Domini sui gaudia*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 408.

⁷¹ "*quae tamen de illo celso thalamo presentiore terris ualet conferre salutem*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 408.

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prison', dying beside Æthelburh's body as it lies in the church.⁷²

Bede makes not direct mention of Æthelburh's burial place, but implies that it was in the church, and Goscelin naturally follows Bede's text. A later chapter indicates that Hildelith, Æthelburh's successor, moved 'the bones of all the brothers and sisters who were buried' into the chapel, presumably including Æthelburh, with no real ceremony of translation. However, the place where they were buried in the chapel was often illuminated with heavenly lights and filled with a pleasant fragrance, sure indications to his readers of the presence of holiness.⁷³

Wulfhild is personally warned of her impending death in Goscelin's *Vita*. Not only does she realise, having tripped while running, that she is going to die soon, she is able to pinpoint the day – that of the nativity of the Virgin Mother of God. There is less in this account of the attendance of the other nuns, possibly as Wulfhild died in London. From there she was taken to Barking and buried beside Æthelburh.⁷⁴

Wulfhild was translated more than once, and both times similar miracles occur. The first move was that from London to Barking, on which journey a 'wicked man' tries to help, but the body is rooted to the spot until he lets go. This brings him to a realisation of his sins, and having repented, he is allowed to help 'for about two miles right up to the monastery of its everlasting resting place'.⁷⁵ While Wulfhild is then described as being 'buried beside the head of the most blessed and first mother of that same church, Æthelburh', thirty years later, Liflæd, the next abbess, decides to move the bodies of all three abbess-saints, Æthelburh, Hildelith and Wulfhild, to a more prominent place next to the high altar.⁷⁶ At this point, Wulfhild appears to another woman in the convent, approving of the move and asking that she be covered so as not to be revealed to the crowd. Judith-Wulfruna, one of Wulfhild's

⁷² "ad regnum educta est de ruinoso carcere quam di teneretur carcerali stabilitate", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 409.

⁷³ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 410-11. Compare Bede, *HE*, iv: 10, p. 362-65.

⁷⁴ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 429-30.

⁷⁵ "per duo fere miliaria usque in monasterium quietionis perpetuae sustulit", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 431.

⁷⁶ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 431-32.

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pupils, requests the privilege of doing this, thus proving herself to be a worthy successor to both Wulfhild and Liflæd (who seems to be being criticised for allowing Judith-Wulfruna to take this role). Judith-Wulfruna is then able to touch the holy body, and be witness that the body is undecayed and 'so much perfume of heavenly sweetness breathed forth from the body that the whole church overflowed with it'.⁷⁷

When the time comes to move the body, however, it does not move again, because of someone 'whom the abbess had condemned to servitude for fraud'. Only when the woman has been recognised, and everyone present prays for her forgiveness, is the body able to be moved to the new position.⁷⁸ This is a remarkably similar miracle to that of the 'wicked man', with a very similar solution, perhaps emphasising the importance of repentance and forgiveness. At neither translation does it seem that a bishop was present, which is unusual at this point in history. Wulfhild, then, is presented as a saint elevated by her community rather than one sanctioned by the Church, but her demands to be translated do not appear to have left the community with much choice, as displeasing a saint is not wise.

Edith is given a double warning. Her death is first foreseen by her spiritual father, Archbishop Dunstan, as he presides at the dedication of the church which she has helped to build. However, he does not tell her about it, but simply urges her to 'constantly be ready with lighted lamp to run to meet Christ'.⁷⁹ Edith herself then has a vision of an ox walking round her bath cauldron singing, from which she knows that her death approaches, which is further foreshadowed when her doves die.⁸⁰ So Edith has definite warning about her death, but, unlike Æthelburh and Wulfhild, she worries that she is not worthy of the heavenly bridegroom. While she 'burned with desire [...] for her passage to eternity', she also thought of the other nuns around her:

She commended, with such great love, the souls of her sisters bent on the love of

⁷⁷ "*Tanta uero inde exhalabant paradysiacae suauitatis aromata ut tota ecclesia redundaret plena*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 432.

⁷⁸ "*quam abbitissa ipsa ob fraudem aurificii damnauerat seruitute*" Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 432-33.

⁷⁹ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 55-56.

⁸⁰ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 57.

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Christ, while she committed herself to the prayers of them all, with denunciations about her own life, lamenting that she had not fulfilled the desires she had vowed and set out for herself.⁸¹

Edith's convent sisters witness her last words, which are of thanks to God. As one of the sisters runs to the church, she meets an angel and hears the singing of a heavenly choir, and thus is reassured that Edith has gone to heaven. Goscelin describes the funeral ceremony as a grand occasion:

When all the crowds and the church fathers and officials had come together to the royal funeral, the noble ceremonies were celebrated, nor would an accompaniment of greater ceremony have been fitting if the royal daughter of an earthly king had been led in procession to her marriage.⁸²

Edith is buried where she had planned to be, in the chapel she had built for St Denis. Thirty days later, her mother, Wulfthryth, has a vision in which her daughter appears to her and describes how she has overcome the accusations of Satan, and is now safely in heaven.⁸³

Edith's death and funeral, then, is described as a form of wedding feast. In part this is Goscelin working Edith into the form of a contemplative, giving her similar motivations to those which he considered Eve should have. This wedding theme is not something seen in the two Barking *vitae*, which is possibly also in part due to Edith's age at death, as she was much younger than the two abbesses.

Edith's translation takes place thirteen years later, and in Goscelin's work it is preceded by visions appearing to her brother, King Æthelred, and two other noblemen; 'she besought each of them to give their authority for her elevation'.⁸⁴ Having gained secular approval for translation, she then appears (along with her favourite saint, Denis) to Archbishop Dunstan.⁸⁵ Thus, Edith's translation is attended by both royal and episcopal validation, though in *The*

⁸¹ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 58.

⁸² Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 59.

⁸³ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 59-61.

⁸⁴ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 69.

⁸⁵ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 69-71. In fact, if Edith died in 984, Dunstan followed her only four years later. See Hollis, 'St Edith and the Wilton Community', pp. 245-280, esp. 256-61 for a discussion on the importance of Dunstan in sanctioning Edith's elevation to sainthood.

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Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres and *Nova Legenda Anglie* it is only the bishop who matters, and there is no mention of her brother, the King. Although the other saints discussed in this study are all connected to royalty, the involvement of King Æthelred in Edith's translation is unique, and thus elevates her to the position of a more nationally-recognised saint, which is further acknowledged by the interest of successive kings in her cult.

Like Edith, Eadburh died young. She appears to have suffered from a sort of wasting disease, as she fights 'weakening strength', but continues to push her body as a form of penitence.⁸⁶ Thus she has a good reason to foresee her own passing, and be ready for it. She summons all the nuns and announces her death, requesting their prayers, but in her final Mass 'she herself plays the part of their leader in the church's office' and leads them in the singing.

Thus the generous-hearted virgin Eadburh, the bride of the Highest King, her life drawn away from the prison of the present world, in confessing the true faith and acknowledging the one God, passed to heaven, carried to the courts of the holy angels, ready to be crowned with the holy virgins.⁸⁷

Not only does she have witnesses to her death, but having died so soon after confession, there was no doubt as to her being free of all sin. Osbert then emphasises her holiness in death by an extended lesson on the Bride of Christ.

Eadburh's humility in death is expressed in her desire to be buried in 'a humble tomb in the outside courtyard'.⁸⁸ However, the miracles which occur there 'spread throughout the world', leading to a need to move her to a more dignified (or regulated) place.⁸⁹ The tension between the humble person and the glorious saint are clearly seen here, as Osbert discusses the spread of miracles and fame across Britain, the effect of her translation, before Eadburh herself is described as demanding elevation. Where the person had been content to be buried

⁸⁶ "*debiles arctus*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 279-80.

⁸⁷ "*Ita generosa uirgo et sponsa summi regis Eadburga uite subtracta presentis ergastulo, in confessione uere fidei et unius Dei cognitione migravit ad celum, cum sacris coronanda uirginibus sanctorum subuecta presidiis angelorum*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 281.

⁸⁸ "*in atrio humilem elegit sepulturam*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 283.

⁸⁹ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 284.

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outside, the saint requires more honour.⁹⁰

Eadburh first manifests her displeasure at being buried outside by preventing a nun from shutting the window from the church into the courtyard. The immovable window is read as a sign by the nuns that Eadburh does not want to be cut off from her Bridegroom, who is depicted as being more present inside the church than outside.⁹¹ This leads the nuns to discuss the moving of their saint inside, without any mention of the need to have episcopal approval (as was also the case for Wulfhild):

a serious concern activated the older ladies and disposed them to be eager about the transfer of the body of the holy virgin. They discussed among themselves whether a notable tomb should be made for her in the chapel, thinking that so great a portent should in no way be left free from mystery, which they confessed had appeared to be arranged by heaven, by divine intervention.⁹²

However, the nuns, without taking advice from higher ecclesiastical authorities,

hurried [her] into a second tomb in the monastery outside the choir, where the general throng was accustomed to gather, and to be solemnly present at prayer with the divine praises.⁹³

Eadburh, however, does not want to be among the crowd. Instead she appears in a vision, and 'ordered that she should be moved to a more prominent part of the sacred building. She demanded to be placed beside the Lord's Table'.⁹⁴ So Eadburh is translated again by the nuns, and 'no day could be without a miracle; rather, no day shone forth without continuously pouring forth many miracles'.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ This is similar to the account of that other great Winchester saint, Swithun. He had been buried outside the church, but later demanded to be moved to a position of more importance, and was also translated by Bishop Æthelwold. (*Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, vol 1, pp. 443-51).

⁹¹ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 286-88.

⁹² "*et matronas ueteres curiosa sollicitat grauitas, ac de transferendo beate uirginis corpore reddit animatas. Deliberant inter se celebrem ei in oratorio debere fieri sepulturam, mysterio uacare nequaquam tantum existimantes prodigium, quod prouenisse fatebantur diuina dispositione celitus adornatum.*" Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 288.

⁹³ "*Secunda tumulatione extra chorum reconditur in monasterio, ubi uulgaris turma consueuit assistere, et diuinis ad orationem laudibus solenniter interesse*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 288.

⁹⁴ "*ad supereminentiorem edis sacre transferri portionem imperauit. Secus mensam collocari dominicam appetebat*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 288-89.

⁹⁵ "*Nulla quippe uacare dies miraculo poterat, immo sine multis refusa miraculis nulla prorsus radiabat*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 289.

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In death, then, the saint has become demanding, assertive, and bold. These descriptors are all very different from the depiction of the saint in life, but illustrate the power which saints were seen to wield, and a boldness which is very much a feature of the saints after their death. They are directly connected to God, and may no longer need to be concerned about humility, as they are fully aware of their worth.

This was not the last time Eadburh was translated, though. She appears to have been content with her new place, but Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester, who was 'able devoutly to draw out thirteen bodies of saints from unworthy tombs and grant them with due reverence the honour of more worthy tombs', heard of her miracles along with those of her fellow Winchester citizen, St Swithun, and decided 'she should be moved from her tomb to a silver casket, to which the divine grace had directed him in his gracious purpose by the signs of its goodwill'.⁹⁶ This time, it is the bishop, not the community, who decided on the move. The translation of these two saints greatly added to the sanctity and honour of the bishop's see, and although 'divine grace' is seen to approve of the move, the saint herself gives no indication of her desires. It seems that when the bishop appears, the saint relapses into the more humble silence of the devout nun, perhaps an indication of the interactions between bishops and women religious at the time the text was written.

In the *South English Legendary*, however, there is no mention of the translations performed by the nuns, and therefore no sign that Eadburh herself feels that she deserves more honour after her death. The translation described in ll.105-8 seems to conflate both Æthelwold's translation and the later incident whereby Pershore acquired the skull of Eadburh as a relic.⁹⁷ The performance of a holy death and a saintly desire to be elevated are not shown to be considered important in the collection, although the locations of the relics are important. According to the *South English Legendary*, there are three places which have relics of Eadburh, Nunnaminster, Pershore, and 'Burcestre þer beside Oxneford', though there is no explanation

⁹⁶ "eam de tumulo transferri ad thecam argenteam disposuit, cuius benigne uoluntatis uestiga in beneplacito suo gratia diuina direxit", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 291, 292.

⁹⁷ Braswell's 'Saint Edburga', pp. 325-29.

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as to how the relics arrived in this third place.⁹⁸

The *vita* in MS Lansdowne 436 covers Eadburh's multiple translations, but the saint herself does not make much of an appearance after her death in this text. She does show, however, that she wishes to be moved to a more honourable position inside the church and follows the translation by more miracles. Æthelwold hears of her fame and places her in a casket covered in gold, silver and precious stones. The removal of some of Eadburh's bones to Pershore is treated as a separate event from Æthelwold's translation, and once again serves to explain how Eadburh came to be in two places at once, without the text passing judgement on anyone. Miracles continue to be seen in both places.⁹⁹

These various *vitae* of Eadburh in the collections show where she is and (roughly) how she came to be in those places, but they do not concern themselves with how she died or her personality after death. Descriptions of her death are only found in the texts written for her communities, for those who would be concerned to know how a holy person should die. The commissioned *vitae* also indicate that the saint continues to watch over the community and to take part in its daily affairs, while the wider audiences of the collections are expected to be interested in the location of the saint: how she came to be there is of less importance, as is also revealed in Ælflæd's *vita*.

As the only extant text we have for Ælflæd is that found in a collection, her death and translation are only briefly described. There is no mention of witnesses to her death, but

a great multitude of women buried the pious virgin outside the sacred oratory, as she herself had directed, for she did not appoint for herself a tomb in a more conspicuous place.¹⁰⁰

As with Eadburh, it is the increase of miracles which leads to her translation into the church, 'where Christ, in account of the merits of his spouse, bestows immediate benefits on those

⁹⁸ There are multiple St Eadburhs, as Braswell and Ridyard both point out, and so some confusion of person is to be expected: Braswell, 'Saint Edburga', p. 292, n.1; Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 16-17.

⁹⁹ Braswell, 'Saint Edburga', pp. 332-33.

¹⁰⁰ Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, p. 25.

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who ask'.¹⁰¹ There is no mention of who translated her, but the text makes it clear that Romsey is her resting place, which is important in large collections of saints. Collections, then, are an important source of information for potential pilgrims, by providing those who seek miracles with the location of miracle workers.

Therefore, the deaths of the female saints and their post-mortem interactions with their communities play a vital role in figuring the women as saintly. By emphasising the saints' abilities to foresee their own deaths, and thus to prepare both themselves and their fellow nuns for the up-coming change in status, the saints are shown to be holy, to be set apart from their companions. The hagiographers use this episode in the writing of their *vitae* to illustrate the sanctity of the women, and to identify them beyond question as saintly. The creation of the identities of the saints is very closely associated with the presentation of their humble deaths and burials, and with their subsequent post-mortem demands for tombs in more honourable locations.

Miracles in Our Midst

An integral part of being a saint is the ability to perform miracles. Many of these miracles are based on biblical examples, fulfilling Christ's words that 'who believes in me, the works which I do, he will do also, and he will do greater works than these' (John 14:12).¹⁰² The lame are made to walk, the blind to see, and those possessed by demons are released. In individual *vita*, examples of these 'regular' miracles are given as proof of the saint's efficacy. Thus, Æthelburh of Barking cures a blind woman who prays to her in the cemetery, and Wulfthryth, Edith of Wilton's mother, cures 'a certain well-known lady, paralysed for a whole year' after the woman is advised by a vision to go to Wilton.¹⁰³ In collections, such miracles are generally covered under phrases like the one used in the passage about Ælflæd bestowing immediate benefits on those who ask, or in the *South English Legendary* about Eadburh: 'Mani is þe vair miracle, þat God haþ vor hire wrou3t' (l. 102).

¹⁰¹ Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁰² "qui credit in me opera quae ego facio et ipse faciet", Vulgate.

¹⁰³ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 411, Wright and Loncar, p. 76.

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Healing, however, is only one of the forms which miracles take. Many of the saints, especially in the period just after the Conquest, played an important role in protecting their communities and lands, by punishing those who would try to infringe on their rights. As a token of this, some were also active in protecting their bodies after death so that relics could not be removed without official sanction. Thus, during Edith's translation, 'a monk of Glastonbury, Eadwulf by name', attempts to cut some of her clothing, and accidentally grazes the holy body in the process.

Immediately a torrent of blood gushed out, as though it were pouring from a living vein, and stained with its rosy colour the snow-white garments and the paved floor. The presumptuous man flung down in terror his knife and the sacred plunder, and as though he were guilty of the bloody murder of an innocent person he fell down on his face and tried to wash away the guilt of his presumption with his tears. Greater miracles confirmed these miraculous events. For when he got up after performing his penance no blood was seen, but it returned to its proper body as if restored by his penitence.¹⁰⁴

More serious punishment was reserved for those who stole land or actually threatened the body of the saint, but repentance still led to forgiveness. When the Danes attack Barking, they determine to burn the monastery, and one of them, carrying burning material up to the roof, falls:

Having broken his limbs and torn his intestines, he lay lifeless, like a corpse. So his companions, considering this evidence of the divine wrath, condemned his impiety and, carrying his body over which they grieved to the tomb of the most holy virgin Æthelburh, prayed with tears that through her intercession they might gain pity for themselves and life for their lost companion.¹⁰⁵

The man is revived, and he and his companions all convert:

laying aside their arrogant idolatry, [they] submitted their necks to Christ and his virgin Æthelburh, and preached her holy merits, and set up her place with prayers and gifts and with great veneration.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁵ "*Qui fractis membris et ruptis intestinis ut cadauer exanime iacuit. Hinc socii, perpendentes caelestem iram, damnant impietatem suam, delatoque funesto corpore ad monumentum sacratissimae uirginis Ethelburgae, orant flebiliter per ipisus suffragia sibi ueniam et perditio uitam*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 413.

¹⁰⁶ "*abdicata idolatria tumida Christo summittunt colla suaque uirginis Ethelburgae pia predicant merita atque locum eius recolunt uotis et muneribus, ac ueneratione celeberrima*", in Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 414.

Others do not repent until they are dead. A man called Agamund takes over some of Edith's property, and then 'was struck down by the arrival of death without having repented'.¹⁰⁷ His corpse suddenly sits up, and asks his friends for help, as Edith is not letting him either die properly, or return to earth. When his friends have arranged for the return of the property to Edith's community, 'he breathed his last, setting out to meet her as his helper, not avenger'.¹⁰⁸

Individual miracles

Part of what makes a saint an individual are the miracles she performs which are *different* from those of her sister saints. While individuality may be a more modern concern, the different miracles are usually well-represented in the *vitae* written for the community, though interspersed with the more common miracles of healing and punishing. In collections, it is these different miracles which are focused on, since they further differentiate the saints from one another.

For example, the miracles recorded after Æthelburh of Barking's death focus on protection of the community, and of her body. There are four incidents described involving the Danes, in each of which the Danes are punished, repent, and are forgiven. Another item of property, a mass book, is stolen by a priest at the time of the Conquest and taken 'away to his parish across the sea'. When he tries to return, eight years later, a great storm comes up, threatening the boat, until the priest 'mindful of his guilt', confesses to Æthelburh that he has her book and promises to return it, at which point the storm subsides. The book's restoration is a communal affair, with 'all the children of the church' giving thanks to God, not only for the return of the book, but the means by which it had been brought back.¹⁰⁹ The loss of this precious mass book does not appear in the *Nova Legenda Anglie*, probably because it was less important to the general laity than to the community of Barking.

There are only two miracles recorded for Wulfhild after her translation was completed, both involving her pupil Judith-Wulfruna, but they also show the saint's care for her people. The

¹⁰⁷ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁸ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁹ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 411-17.

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first is the miraculous filling of Judith-Wulfruna's purse after she complains to Wulfhild that she has given the saint her best tunic, and now needs one herself. The second has Judith-Wulfruna again complaining, this time that she has lost the keys to the church. When the keys are miraculously found at her feet, Judith-Wulfruna then continues to complain: 'you could have given these back to me long ago and helped me in my anxiety'.¹¹⁰ The interaction between the abbess and the saint show a companionship which has not been altered by the change in Wulfhild's status, thus depicting Wulfhild as a very approachable saint, to members of her own community, if not necessarily to the laity at large.

In contrast to the two ladies from Barking, there are many miracles ascribed to Edith and her mother.¹¹¹ Miracles which occur during Edith's lifetime appear to be performed by God for the saint, revealing her to be blessed and chosen by God. When a candle falls into the box containing her clothes, they do not burn, a miracle which Goscelin saw as a sign that God approved of Edith's royal garments as a covering for her hair shirt.¹¹² Also, when Edith and Wulfthryth obtain a nail from the True Cross, Æthelwold desires a bit of it, but after trying to file it, they find the nail is whole again the next day, thus indicating that the women who have 'acquired them with very diligent labour and faith' (and one hundred pounds in silver) should have the relic undivided.¹¹³

Wulfthryth, on the other hand, performs miracles both of healing and of punishing before her death. Using water in which she has washed her hands, she heals a blind man, an action which many of the other Anglo-Saxon female saints also perform. However, the punishing miracles are the most interesting because of the ways in which they change over time. In Goscelin's version, the sheriff who wrongly imprisons two of Wulfthryth's priests dies suddenly and violently, 'and paid the penalty incurred by his arrogance'.¹¹⁴ Likewise,

¹¹⁰ "*Sic iam dudum poteras redississe et meae curae subuenisse*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 433-34.

¹¹¹ It is probable that Wulfthryth, Edith's mother, was the saint initially remembered at Wilton. Goscelin's *Translatio of Edith* includes a number of miracles performed by Wulfthryth. See Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 72- 77.

¹¹² Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 43-44.

¹¹³ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 45-46.

¹¹⁴ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 73.

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officers who chase a thief into the church are

condemned to perpetual blindness [...] so that they could not see to lead away themselves or anyone else, nor could they destroy anyone, while they brought destruction on themselves.¹¹⁵

Although the author of the *Wilton Chronicle*, five hundred years later, follows Goscelin closely with respect to the lives and miracles of Edith and Wulfthryth, this story has been altered. Both the sheriff and the officers are given the opportunity to repent, and then are healed by the same woman, Wulfthryth. Rather than dying, the sheriff becomes very sick, and fears that he will die, so he asks forgiveness of the abbess. She prays for him, and he is healed. The men who chase the robber into the church also ask for her forgiveness and help, and again she prays and they are healed.¹¹⁶

In Goscelin's *Legend of Edith*, when the saint punishes craftsmen who steal some of the metal which Cnut has given for a new shrine for her, the three men are blinded, and left to beg for the rest of their lives.¹¹⁷ The *Wilton Chronicle* expands on the miracle by causing the men to be trapped in the church, openly carrying the gold, and also blind. When they beg for forgiveness, she allows them to leave the church, but they remain blind.¹¹⁸ Thus, it would seem that, by the fifteenth century, the Wilton community was no longer concerned about the theft of its lands, as it had been in Goscelin's time. Instead, theft of more moveable goods was perceived as a more pressing issue to the community, and so severely punished by the saint.

Eadburh is also recorded as having performed specific miracles of healing when she was alive. Through the use of water in which she has washed her hands, she heals a blind woman; the first of the miracles attributed to her.¹¹⁹ This is not a unique miracle, but it is one which attached itself particularly to Eadburh, as all three of the texts looked at here include it.

¹¹⁵ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 73-74.

¹¹⁶ Horstmann, *Wilton Chronicle*, ll. 2851-2970.

¹¹⁷ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 78-79.

¹¹⁸ Horstmann, *Wilton Chronicle*, ll. 3507-3634.

¹¹⁹ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 275-76.

Identity of the Saint

Added to that miracle, and closely connected to it, is the blinding of those who spy on her. In each text, the spies are forgiven and healed by the saint.¹²⁰

After her death, Eadburh performs miracles much as the other saints do, healing the sick and the blind. In her case, though, there does seem to be a particular focus on her healing of the demon-possessed. In Osbert's *Vita Edburge* two men possessed by demons find relief from Eadburh, though in both instances the abbess at the time, Ælfgifu, takes part by whipping the men in front of the altar.¹²¹ However, of the seven miracles recorded in Harley 64, three involve demon possession (with no mention of whipping), while the other four are healing. In contrast, both the *South English Legendary* and MS Lansdowne 436 end with Eadburh's death and translation, so it would appear that post-mortem miracles are simply expected to be available, particularly at the places where the saints are enshrined.

Ælfflæd's *vita* in MS Lansdowne 436 also ends with her death. However, the miracles recorded as happening while she was alive are quite different from others. When she is reading the lesson, the candle blows out, but her finger provides enough light to finish the service.¹²² At another time, she has a vision in which she sees her teacher gathering switches to beat the girls with, and begs her not to, as they are doing the best that they can, and 'it was found by careful enquiry that what was done by the mistress could not have been known by the scholar, save through the Holy Spirit'.¹²³ The recording of these events supports the theory that miracles preserved in collections are those which are most likely to differentiate one saint from another. They serve to identify the saints, and their current resting places, perhaps as an indication of which saints would be most useful to apply to in times of need.

The ability to perform miracles is the key external sign that a person has been chosen by God as someone set apart. Therefore, in assigning someone as a saint, miracles are to be expected, and in describing the performance of miracles, signs and wonders, a saint is identified.

¹²⁰ Ridyard *Royal Saints*, pp. 276-79, Braswell, pp. 328, 331.

¹²¹ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 297-301.

¹²² Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, p. 21.

¹²³ Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, p. 22.

Identity of the Saint

While the *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon female saints provide evidence of generic miracle-working, some saints seem to develop a particular reputation for certain kinds. Thus, Wulfthryth was repeatedly shown to have healed blindness, while Eadburh was demonstrated to be effective against demon-possession and madness. These individualities of the saints are identifying markers which, even after their deaths, serve to maintain the coherence of the saints as people who were still in contact with, and still concerned for the well-being of, their communities.

Change Over Time

Within these texts there are significant shifts in the presentation of the saint and her miracles. The saint herself becomes more assertive after her death, in part because she no longer has to fill the role of a humble servant of God. However, as the depictions of assertive women seem to appear more often in the texts written for the community, it could also be because the community needs or wants a vocal advocate who will protect them not only from foreign invasion but also from the interference of churchmen. Therefore, the nuns of Nunnaminster are right to translate their saint, Eadburh, without recourse to a bishop, because the saint herself, a more important person than the bishop, demands it, as does Wulfhild of Barking. So too, Wilton asserts its rights as a place of sanctuary, because the abbess, Wulfthryth, can send the officers of the court away blinded (though this happens when she is alive).

Another change visible over time is that deeds punished by death or permanent injury in the earlier texts are commuted in later texts to illness which leads to the repentance of the evil-doer and the display of mercy by the saint. This is most clearly seen in the difference between Goscelin's *Legend of Edith*, and the *Wilton Chronicle*, and also appears in the *Life of Etheldrede* in the same manuscript. There are two possible interpretations of this change. The first is that mercy, especially as shown by the actions of the Blessed Virgin, becomes a more important part of medieval theology in the twelfth century.¹²⁴ Thus the ideal of what a saint should be shifts to include more mercy.

¹²⁴ See, for example, R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London: Hutchinson, 1967), pp. 234-44, or Rachel Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 244-88.

The other possibility is that the focus of the miracles changes to healing, rather than the provision of mercy. Finucane, in *Miracles and Pilgrims*, notes that shrines played different roles at different times, but also that

[a]nalysis of the surviving miracle reports from English and European shrines between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries indicates that over nine-tenths of the wonders were cures of human illnesses.¹²⁵

While protecting the saint's community from attack, whether from foreign invasion, or greedy land-holders, was important to the community, what was more needed by the population in general, especially during a period when medicine was an inexact science, was access to healing and protection of the physical body. Thus, while the *vitae* written for the communities housing the shrines include ideas of the saints' protective abilities, the *vitae* in collections are more focused on advertising the saints' abilities to heal the sick. The careful location of the relics of saints in collections could indicate that a key purpose of such a collection was the promotion among the laity of pilgrimages to healing shrines.

Collections vs Individual Vitae

Saints' *vitae*, then, are a complex mix of conformity and individuality. The more complete *vitae*, usually written at the request of the community which housed the relics of the saint, needed to keep two aims in sight. The *vita* had to show how the saint conformed to the *typos* of a holy life and death, fitting the saint into a pattern established long before the Anglo-Saxon or English church. Virgins were highly sought after, some form of temptation needed to be resisted, and self-denial in many forms was important. On the other hand, the writers of these *vitae* were often working with the living memory of real people. This led to occurrences which did not fit so neatly into the *typos*, but did provide material for the other important role of the *vita*, that is to individuate the saints, showing them to have been historically real and unique persons. Therefore, the historical period is of importance in the introduction of the saints, as is the genealogy, giving them a place in history and a history of their own. Although the saints in this current study are located in an Anglo-Saxon pre-

¹²⁵ Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, pp. 13, 59.

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Conquest past, the emphasis in the post-Conquest *vitae* is on continuity and familiarity. While some episodes in a life might need explanation due to the change in culture or in the expectations of sanctity, the balance of these *vitae* display an ongoing community of Anglo-Saxon saints and their people.

Individuating items are also important to the *vitae* found in collections, but there the episodes are stripped down to the most basic narrative. The locations of the saint's relics are important, as there are many saints in the collection. So too is the historical period, and the holy life. On the other hand, collections do not usually devote much space to the saints' actions after death, as it is assumed that they will heal and help, as saints should. Instead the *vitae* concentrate on the person of the saint while alive, and the miracles she performed, or the experiences of her life, which help to differentiate her from the others. The *typos* of saintly life is assumed, so that the episodes included can serve to identify the one saint among the multitude.

The individualities of the Anglo-Saxon female saints are revealed on closer inspection. While there are certain *typoi* to be filled, the saints are identified as separate people with separate personalities. This is shown not only through their connection with important figures from Anglo-Saxon history, but also at each step in the process of becoming a saint. In texts written within living memory, the saints are particularly detailed in their actions and, in the case of Edith, even their physical descriptions. *Vitae* serve to illustrate more than just the life and death of a holy person, they flesh her out into a character who interacts with the community. These texts reveal figures from the past as individuals who are identifiable as both saints and as historical people. Thus, these saints are established each in her own personal identity and all in the shared traits of the identity of sainthood.

Chapter III

Community, Audience and Text

The life of the most holy virgin Wulfhild shines forth far and wide among the people and the churches and especially in the places of her own people, and it is spoken of in the mouths of the many, as in books. [...] Daughters of today have seen the aged mothers of the community bearing witness to her sanctity.

(Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *Life of St Wulfilda*.¹)

Just as the identities of the Anglo-Saxon female saints were inflected by their location within historical time, physical places, and holy families, so to their identities are molded by the hagiographers to create people acceptable to a range of audiences. Change over time affects the ways in which saints and women were regarded, and new texts were written to keep the saints relevant for the changing culture. The *vita* of a saint creates an expectation of how a saint should act in life and after death, but the *vita* also has to fulfil expectations already existing in society. Thus, rewritten *vitae* allow us to understand more about the ideas of holy living and a saintly afterlife. They show us who was likely to become a saint, and under what circumstances, thus providing us with insights into living conditions both during the saint's lifetime and at the period of writing. The texts studied here also reveal something of the identities of the communities which remembered the saints, and how the saints were retained in their memories. Miracles performed during the life of a saint are an indication of her being honoured by God. Miracles after her death reveal an on-going relationship between the saint and her community. Many of the miracles which are recorded are a sign of what types of miracles the saint can be expected to perform for those in need. Over time, a saint was expected to continue to produce miracles, and, as expectations of saints shift, so too did the types of miracles they performed. The actions recorded in a *vita*, therefore, can be expected to change with changes in society and in the audience, thus altering the identity of the saint.

¹ "*Vita sacratissimae uirginis Vulfildae late refulget et in populo et in ecclesiis et maxime in suis popularibus locis atque in ore multorum recitatur ut in libris. [...] Videre hodiernae filiae grandeuas matres suae institutionis testantissimas suae sanctitatis.*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 418.

Audience and the Saint

The audience is an important factor in the writing of a *vita*, as the intended readership will affect what is included. If the audience knew the saint personally, or through oral records, they will maintain an image of how she acted and what she said. Audiences more distant in time from the saint have fewer personal expectations, but are likely to have strong preconceptions about how a saint should interact with others, what sorts of activities a saint should perform, and what kind of miracles a saint will produce. Also important is the purpose in the audience's reading or listening to the text. Saints' *vitae* can be used to inspire faith, to remember a founder, as an example of holy living, and to provide a centre for a community, but there are also instances of *vitae* that appear to be written as entertainment, as courtly stories for a wider (possibly lay) audience.

For a community which held its saint in living memory, the saint's *vita* needed to be written with care. It had to balance general expectations of a saint with the active knowledge of those who had encountered her or who had heard the stories from the older members of the community who had encountered her. The benefit of such a text is that it contains more details, with references to objects and traditions within the community. The saint's *vita* then becomes part of the history of the community, documenting its memories and the relics it possesses, and creating a point around which the community exists. The identities of the saint, the community, and the intended audience are intertwined.

On the other hand, *vitae* written at a greater distance – either of time or space or both – have less connection to, and contain less information of, the immediate community of the saint. The community has less input into the recording of the *vita*, and thus it is not as important in the depiction of the saint. The writer is therefore free to use more imagination, and also to align the saint with the expectations of a wider audience. The saint is often given more speech as there is no need to limit her to the actions retained in living memory. At the same time there is a greater need to have the saint conform to the expectations of an audience who 'knows' how saints act based on how saints are depicted in other texts. This emphasises the idea that the identity and actions of the saint are dependent on the intended audience.

This chapter is a series of case studies of texts written for the communities to which saints or their relics belong. It starts with Goscelin's work in the eleventh century, written at the request of communities which held their saint in active memory, Wilton and Barking, but dedicated to Norman bishops. Here we see the text and the author negotiating conflicting notions of a particular saint, and encapsulating the saint within the community for future remembrance. The chapter then turns to Osbert, whose twelfth-century *vita* of Eadburh of Nunnaminster was written at the request of the monks of Pershore, who had come into possession of some of her relics. However, this text shows a consciousness of the competing claims of Nunnaminster, and ends by asserting the rights of both communities to the saint and her miracles. The third section of the chapter then returns to Wilton. Here the *Wilton Chronicle* attempts to renew interest in the community and their patron saint through a melding of genres: historiography, romance and history. This fifteenth-century text reveals the change in the composition of the community through language use, and the distance in time from St Edith through the freedom of re-writing her speeches and actions. The final section of this chapter focuses on Ely and St Æthelthryth, and compares the *Liber Eliensis* – written in the twelfth century by a monk of Ely who was devoted to Æthelthryth – with the *Life of St Etheldrede* which is attached to the *Wilton Chronicle*. Here the difference can be seen between an author who is a member of a male community based around a female saint and a writer who comes from a more distant time and place, especially in how Æthelthryth is shown to act while she was alive.

Addressing an Audience: Goscelin's Works, Local Communities and Norman Bishops

The most detailed Anglo-Saxon female saints' *vitae* are those addressed to a particular audience, those which were written at the request of a community. These represent the saints, both before and after their deaths, as integral to their communities, as the centre around which the communities were maintained. The *vitae* can therefore be read for the information on the intended or addressed audience, as they reveal the expectations of different members of society of how a female religious community, and their saint, should behave. The role of these audiences in the writing of the *vitae* is subtle, however, and is most

clearly shown in the representation of the saint as both a part of and superior to the group. What is more visible in reading these texts is the role which the intended audience played in shaping the identity of the saint as presented by the hagiographers.

Goscelin, one of the most prolific hagiographers in the post-Conquest period, wrote *vitae* of many Anglo-Saxon saints, mostly at the requests of their communities.² Of interest to this study are the two versions of the *Legend of Edith* of Wilton and the *vitae* included in the texts which he wrote for the nuns at Barking: *The Life of Saint Ethelburga*, and *The Life of Wulfilda*.³ However, these texts are also addressed to Norman, or at least Continental, churchmen: the *Legend of Edith* is dedicated to Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury (1070-89), and the *vitae* of Æthelburh and Wulfhild are dedicated to Maurice, Bishop of London (1086-1107). These two conflicting audiences – the nuns of the religious community housing the saints' shrine on the one hand, and powerful prelates with expectations of how a saint might and should act on the other – create a tension in what is recorded and how it is presented, as is evidenced by the two extant versions of the *vita* of Edith.

In the case of both Edith (c. 961-84) and Edith's aunt, Wulfhild of Barking (d. c. 990), Goscelin was interacting with nuns who still retained 'active memory' of the saints, particularly the older ones who had heard about Edith or Wulfhild directly from eye-witnesses. In *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe*, Elisabeth van Houts discusses the transmission of 'active memory', whereby one generation passes on important information to the next. After three generations, the transmission of this information becomes less certain, and there is a move to record the memories for the future. She notes that, 'if we accept that in the Middle Ages each generation lasted for about thirty years, we may accept a period of between 90 and 120 years as a period of 'active memory''.⁴ Thus, while Goscelin had access to vital sources for the recording of the saints' *vitae*, he also was aware of active critics who would not lightly accept a substantial re-writing of a person whom they remembered. On the other hand, Anglo-

² Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 384.

³ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 17-23; Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', *Life and Translation of Ethelburga*, pp. 398-417 and *Life and Translation of Wulfilda*, pp. 418-34.

⁴ van Houts, *Memory and Gender*, p. 5-6.

Saxon royal saints did not comfortably fit the patterns which Continental bishops were expecting. Archbishop Lanfranc, in particular, showed himself to be highly sceptical of the proliferation of Anglo-Saxon saints, and might have been less than impressed by Edith of Wilton's collection of animals in her menagerie.⁵

Goscelin explains and justifies his methods of data collection in the dedicatory prologues to the bishops. In the version of his *Legend of Edith* which is addressed to Archbishop Lanfranc (Bodleian Library, Rawl. C 938 [Rawlinson]), he places Edith securely in a historic and not too distant past, and traces the transmission of the information which he is presenting. He is writing of 'Edith, who was born in royalty, [...] for indeed only yesterday we had as king Edward, the son of her brother, who today has handed on the rule to William'.⁶ His information comes from the

chief lady of her monastery, Godiva, who is now the fifth in line from [Edith's] birth-mother. [...] [T]he other spiritual mothers of the present time, as faithful as they are of noble birth, as well as the things which they saw with their own eyes, declare confidently, with other appropriate evidence, those things which they heard from the venerable senior nuns, who both saw the holy virgin herself and devotedly obeyed her; whose high birth and religious lives are recognised as being equal in credibility to books.⁷

He declares the trustworthiness of the information passed on from the senior nuns as being equal to that of written record, although their noble birth plays a substantial part in their honesty. In the *Legend of Edith*, then, the preface promises a record both of eyewitness accounts and of reported memories.

Similarly, the effect of having a witness to Wulfhild's life is clear both in Goscelin's dedication to Bishop Maurice and in the chapters around the translation and subsequent miracles. Goscelin traces the memory of Wulfhild, stating that her fame had spread in part because of

⁵ Susan Ridyard, 'Condigna Veneratio: Post-Conquest Attitudes to the Saints of the Anglo-Saxons', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 9 (1987), 179-206 (p. 201-4).

⁶ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 23-4.

⁷ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 24.

her nearness to our time, as indeed there are many still living in our own day who witnessed her and her holy conversation in the flesh. [...] The most famous among the younger ones is her nun-scholar Wulfruna, called Judith, educated under her from her first youth, who lived right up to the reign of our King William.⁸

Goscelin uses this traceable transmission of memory as a justification for the recording of the miracles included, so that Maurice might have information about the Barking saints with which to defend their sanctity against outsiders.⁹

Goscelin's dedication to the *Life of St Ethelburga* also requests the Bishop of London's defence, and again the line of transmission is displayed. This saint lived in the more distant past, and Bede is Goscelin's main source. However, Goscelin is here trying 'to set forth these things a little more copiously and gracefully, to suit the longings of those who desire them'.¹⁰ Where he strays from Bede's account, he says,

if we add anything else to these facts, we have chosen them by reading them elsewhere. But those miracles of the same holy virgin, having been made known in recent times or in our own times, which are added here, and those which by the affection of the sisters who are still living, or of others of the faithful who recall seeing those events happening, are included here as being well known.¹¹

The evidence of eye-witnesses and of transmitted memory is again placed on a par with written accounts of the saint and her miracles. Van Houts notes that these passages from the dedications

are the clearest evidence we have for the male hagiographer's belief that he had to defend himself, and his female informers, against scepticism about the veracity of his

⁸ "de proximitate temporis ut uidelicet ad nostra plerique tempora durauerint qui ipsam et sanctam eius conuersationem in carne conspexerint. [...] Notissima est adolescentioribus eius sanctimonialis discipula Vulfruna, Iudith cognominata, a primeo flore sub ipsa educata, quae ad nostri regis Vuiliemi superuixit sceptrum", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 418. There is some question as to whether this was William I (1066-1087) or his son, William II (1087-1100), as Maurice's episcopal rule bridged the gap. The dedication of the *Legend of Edith* to Lanfranc suggests the first William, though Colker's footnote indicates he opts for William II (p. 418, n. 146.)

⁹ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 418.

¹⁰ "paulo diffusius et commendatius ad appetitum desiderantium conor exponere", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 398.

¹¹ "Sed et siquid his addimus, alibi legendo accepimus. Quae autem proximis uel nostris temporibus propalata ipsius sanctae uirginis subiunguntur miracula, adhuc uiuentium sororum affectione uel aliorum fidelium qui itidem uidere relatione, habentur notissima", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 398.

and their narrative. It seems to me obvious that Goscelin is not defending the oral tradition which had kept the stories about the saintly women alive, but rather is clearly defending the fact that this tradition was transmitted by women.¹²

However, for the tradition of a female saint active within a female community, there could be no better transmission, and Goscelin is clearly aware of this. He expects the bishops to recognise the validity of the nuns' memories also. Thus, Goscelin's record of Ss Edith, Wulfhild, and Æthelburh are all informed by the traditions circulating in the communities in which the saints lived. In committing these traditions to writing, he also preserves them for future members of the community who do not have personal memories of the saint.

These traditions, while providing sources for *vitae*, are also a source of tension. A living person, retained in living memory, does not always fit the saintly pattern, no matter how holy they may seem to be at times. The community's memories restrict what the hagiographer can write about the saint. Episodes in her life can be omitted, but where the episodes explain relics left behind, delicacy is needed. These tensions are visible to us today because of the survival of two versions of Goscelin's *vita* of Edith. The Rawlinson version, mentioned earlier, is dedicated to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc. In it certain incidents are glossed over which appear in a revised version probably intended for the nuns at Wilton, and now found in Cardiff, Public Library, MS I. 381, fols 81-120 (Cardiff).¹³

Thus, in the Cardiff manuscript there is a sense of personal connection with the saint. There is more detail about her wearing of the royal purple instead of the black nuns' habit. In Rawlinson, on the other hand, this detail is reduced to one mention, immediately followed by the information that she was wearing a hair shirt underneath, and being an example to Æthelwold.¹⁴ This suggests that the stories of her wearing rich clothing were still circulating within the Wilton community at the time when Goscelin was collecting his material. However, the miracle he describes as 'playful', where a candle fell into the chest containing her clothes and yet did not burn them, is included in both versions. While this event then

¹² van Houts, *Memory and Gender*, p. 52.

¹³ For more detail, see also Hollis, 'Goscelin and the Wilton Women', pp. 237-50.

¹⁴ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 38, 42-43.

draws attention to her royal clothing, the reason for its inclusion in Rawlinson is, I believe, because 'the chest itself, the proof of this miracle, is preserved in the monastery and presents reliable evidence: it is charred on the inside'.¹⁵ The mnemonic device, van Houts' 'memory peg', is a relic preserved, which the archbishop would have been able to see had he wanted to.¹⁶ However, Cardiff also records for the nuns Edith's 'rod which blossoms by a figural mystery', and an alb which she wove and embroidered, which were kept in Winchester. They do not show up in Rawlinson, though presumably Lanfranc could have travelled there also.¹⁷ These relics are presented as proof of the historicity of the saint, and therefore the reliability of his work, showing a concern for believability on the part of the hagiographer.

The personal connection of the Wilton nuns is also visible in the story of Edith's menagerie: in Rawlinson, Goscelin simply says that she could call wild animals and they would come to her. He states that if 'a time of persecution' were reinstated, Edith would not need to fear the wild beasts.¹⁸ In the Cardiff version, intended for the nuns, Edith's collection of animals receives full attention, suggesting that it was something which stuck in the memories of the nuns, and perhaps the remains of the 'courtyard attached to the wall of the monastery' were still visible. Edith is depicted not only as calling the wild animals, but as housing them, and spending time with them 'whenever she was at leisure'.¹⁹ This is much more a portrait of a noble woman than a saint who spent her time looking after the poor, and also serves to record historical details about the keeping of animals as pets.

A more significant variation for the depiction of a saint, however, is found in the section about Edith's devotions. Cardiff portrays her particular devotion to the apostles, and also to Saint Denis whom 'she compelled [...] to be her closest patron'. The manuscript further describes another relic housed at Wilton, the 'manual of her devotions [kept] as a token of her memory, in which the apostolic precepts shine out, written in her virginal hand, with

¹⁵ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 43-44.

¹⁶ See van Houts, "Objects as Pegs For Memory", in *Memory and Gender*, pp. 93-120.

¹⁷ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 48, see also n. 116.

¹⁸ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 42, n. 81.

¹⁹ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 41-42.

little prayers subjoined to them'.²⁰ Edith both writes and composes prayers, which are added to other works. This is in sharp contrast to the illustration of Edith found in the version intended for Lanfranc, which fails to mention either St Denis or Edith's writing. Instead, she is depicted as a voracious reader, with special attention to reading the *vitae* of her aunt Edith of Tamworth, the sister of Edgar, and her grandmother, Queen Ælfgifu.²¹ While Stephanie Hollis attributes the devotion to St Denis in Cardiff as a later inspiration which Goscelin inserted to explain Edith's building a church dedicated to Denis, it could also be that Goscelin considered the archbishop more likely to look upon reading rather than writing as a suitable occupation for a woman, and in particular, reading about women.²²

While we do not have two separate versions of the Barking *vitae*, it is probable that there were similar tensions for the hagiographer to negotiate. What is more visible in the *Life of St Wulfilda* is the input of the personal, the eye-witness account of miracles from a trusted source, the abbess Judith-Wulfruna, who had been a student of Wulfhild. The witness to these miracles thus has a direct connection not only with the saint, but also with the hagiographer, as she was alive in the reign of 'our King William', and so if Goscelin did not personally talk to her, he would have talked with those who knew her well.²³ The miracles show a close and trusting relationship between the abbess and the saint, who is not conceived of as having changed in personality due to her death:

Judith herself, full of faith, used to converse with the entombed lady, just as she had formerly been accustomed to do when she was still in her living body, when she was the most devoted pupil. So she, when the monastery had been plundered by a hostile army and she was suffering from want, thus addressed herself to the merits of mother Wulfhild: 'Behold, mother, I gave you the garment which I had, so give me a tunic which I need'.²⁴

²⁰ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 34.

²¹ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 63.

²² Hollis, 'Goscelin and the Wilton Women', p. 241-2.

²³ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 418.

²⁴ "*Ipsa autem Iudith fide plena ita fabulabatur cum sepulta domina sicut quondam solebat cum ea adhuc in corpore uiua, cum esset deuotissima ipsius discipula. Quae cum depredato ab hostili exercitu monasterio temptaretur inopia, sic affata est nota matris Wulfildis merita: 'Ecce, dedi tibi, mater, pannum qualem habebam. Da ergo mihi tunicam necessariam'*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 433. The garment refers to Judith's 'best and most shining over-tunic' used to cover Wulfhild at her translation (p. 432).

Community, Audience, Text

This is not the form of address likely to be used by those coming in fear of the saint. At another point, Judith also complains to St Æthelburh when she has lost the keys to the church:

At length, being weary, she had recourse to the blessed Æthelburh, and with a certain spirited complaint addressed her in faith: 'Why do you cause me such trouble. For you must know very well where the things are that I have lost, and you do not reply when I ask.' As she said this, she straightway found the keys which she had been searching for, there and in the sight of everyone.²⁵

The personal relationship displayed and recorded here would have had an effect on the way other members of the community approached the saint. The stories told by Judith would have been current in the nunnery at Barking, and recording them held them for posterity, although what the bishop might have thought of them is unclear. The community, in reading Goscelin's account, while maybe not approaching the familiarity of Judith, would feel that they could comfortably address the saints and expect their help in the small problems of this world.

Thus, Goscelin is conscious of a range of responses in his audience. He is concerned to preserve the history and the transmitted memory of the saints. The identity of the saint therefore negotiates a fine line between the communal memory and episcopal expectation. Artefacts within the community are identified with the saint, informing the interactions between the past and present members. The embroidered alb, the box which would not burn and the tomb of the saint are visual reminders of their shared past, and Goscelin's text provides the background and the verification of their authenticity. Living memory is thus preserved via a text for future members of the community, tying them back to the saint. At the same time, Goscelin has to allow for a wider audience, in particular the bishops to whom he dedicated the works. The personalised saint legitimates the agency of the community in the articulation of the saint, therefore partaking of the commemoration of the community itself, linking the present to the remembered past. The identity of the saint and community inform and validate each other.

²⁵ *"tandem defessa ad beatam Aethelburgam recurrit et cum quadam inuentione animosae fidei ad eam dixit, 'Quare me tantum tribulas? Bene enim nosti ubi sit quod perdidisti nec respondes querenti.' Hec dicens clauas, quas et ibi et apud omnes scrutata fuerat, ilico ad pedes suos ibidem reperit"*, Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 433-4.

Intermediate Connections: Osbert's *Vita Edburge* and Communities at Odds?

Communities of long-established saints also requested that the *vita* of a saint be re-written, either because they wanted a more elegant version or because they need a *vita* in a language they could understand. As with the communities discussed above, there are visual reminders of the saint: relics, chapels, a tomb. However, these communities no longer retain an active memory of the saint: there is no one who remembers people who saw the saint. Thus, there is less direct evidence about the saint and her actions, and less editorial interference from the intended audience. The author is able to expand on the speeches and provide an even greater 'holy gloss' on the actions of the saint. This does not give the author complete freedom to invent new episodes from scratch, but given that saints are *typoi* of Christ and therefore largely interchangeable, some of the examples in a *vita* appear to be borrowed from other saints. This is not inventing an incident so much as transposing it. There is no suggestion that this in anyway falsifies the event: if it happened to *a* saint, it could happen to any saint and so there is no reason why it might not have happened to the saint in question. It does, however, indicate that the historicity of such events which appear for the first time in much later texts should be read with caution, as more revealing of the time in which they were written, and how the identity of the community has changed. These later additions also alter the identity of the saint, as the community projects new needs and new ideas onto her personality.

Like Goscelin, Osbert of Clare (*d.* 1158) wrote the *Vita Edburge* of Nunnaminster at the request of the community which owned her relics.²⁶ However, according to the letter attached to the Laud manuscript, it was the monks of Pershore who had asked Osbert to write 'a new life of S. Edburga in a more elegant manner than former lives'.²⁷ Here we see the distance between the community who wish to memorialise the saint and those who remembered the saint as a person. Not only had nearly two hundred years elapsed since the death of Eadburh, but she had also travelled geographically, with parts of her ending up in Worcester, and the subject

²⁶ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 255-308.

²⁷ *Letters of Osbert of Clare, prior of Westminster*, ed. by E.W. Williamson (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 179.

of male devotion rather than female.²⁸

There is, however, a question as to the intended audience of the *Vita Edburge*. The discrepancy between the *incipit* found in the letter (*Fidelibus sanctae matris ecclesiae*) and that recorded by John Bale (1495-1563)²⁹ (*Fidelibus in Christo sororibus*) points to a possibility that Osbert wrote this *vita* initially for the nuns at Winchester, and that perhaps the addition of the translation of her relics to Pershore and the manuscript with the surviving letter was something that came after the initial composition of the *vita*.³⁰ This argument is further supported by the considerable difference in the level of detail given in the life of Eadburh and her miracles at Winchester, and the miracles which resulted from her transfer to Pershore. Despite being supposedly written for the monks, the text only describes one miracle as occurring at Pershore. While a source text for the first two 'books' (*vita* and *translatio*) is one explanation for this, there is also the possibility that the addition of the Pershore material was an after-thought. Another alternative is that the monks of Pershore had records of the miracles performed there (see, for example, the thirteenth-century manuscript, Harley 64, discussed below) but did not know how to connect their Eadburh with the saint from Winchester.³¹

Vita Edburge is divided into three parts: the *vita*, the *translatio*, and an account of Eadburh's removal to Pershore and her career there. In the introductory letter, Ridyard says that Osbert claims he is writing

to provide for the Pershore monks a re-working of an earlier written source with which they had expressed dissatisfaction, apparently on stylistic grounds. Edburga's deeds had been set down in a style which lacked both clarity and elegance; Osbert's purpose, accordingly, was to produce a more polished literary work.³²

²⁸ The date of Eadburh's death, as with Edith's, is unclear as calculations do not add up, but may be sometime in the early 950s (Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 104, n. 30).

²⁹ John Bale was Bishop of Ossory and a collector of English literature.

³⁰ Williamson, *Letters of Osbert*, p. 25.

³¹ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 35-37, suggests that the Eadburh at Pershore might *not* have been the Eadburh of Winchester.

³² Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 23.

While Ridyard questions the existence of a pre-existing work for the whole piece, it seems from the relation of the *vita* to other texts that there was another source from which they drew their information independently.³³

Although written for a community housing Eadburh's relics, whether monks or nuns, Osbert provides no first-hand, or even third-generation, evidence. It appears that he was working from a written source dated to sometime around or after the period 1032-57, as these are the dates of the bishop, Alfwine, who is described as the contemporary of abbess, Ælfgifu of Cologne. There are no details of miracles after the time of this abbess, though the actual timing of the translation and subsequent events at Pershore is unclear. Ridyard comments that Pershore's early history is troubled and that

there may have been little corporate recollection of precisely when and how those relics had been acquired. [...] it was the function of Osbert of Clare [...] to provide the Pershore relics with a history.³⁴

The poor quality of the Pershore material may be explained as a later addition to a work intended for Nunnaminster, but the references in the same section to the plight of the Winchester nuns suggests otherwise. Had that part of the text been intended for Pershore only, there would have been no need to address the miracles occurring in Winchester:

And so it came about that just as the renowned Eadburh shone with numberless wonders in Pershore, so also she overflowed with abundant charity of miracles for the people of Winchester.³⁵

The text has two intended audiences then, the competing communities who house the relics of Eadburh, one the historically connected house of St Mary's, Nunnaminster, and the other the Benedictine Abbey of Pershore. There is some tension between the two over the manner in which Pershore gained its relics, as the division of a saint's body was forbidden at the time, and over the subsequent claims to Eadburh's miracles, as is evident in the text. Osbert is at

³³ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 25-30.

³⁴ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 130.

³⁵ "*Sicque factum est, ut cum persorensibus innumeris choruscet illustris Eadburga prodigiis, et cum Wintoniensibus copiosa redundet caritate miraculis*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 305

pains to balance the two houses, to ensure that neither feels they have received a bad deal.

Relic theft was a regular occurrence in the medieval period. Successful kidnappings would then be legitimised in written record by means of visions.³⁶ For example, St Wihtburh was said to appear to the monks of Ely, requesting to be removed from where she was. The *Liber Eliensis* recounts the stealth with which the monks stole the body, how they slipped through the cordon of waiting towns-people and returned to Ely by boat. Despite the obvious pains taken to re-unite Wihtburh with her sisters, the success of the mission is explained as the will of the saint.³⁷ Thus, in times when anything that went well was the will of God and the desire of the saint, a successful relocation of a saint must have been at her will.

However, while saints are repeatedly depicted as appearing in visions, demanding to be moved from places unfit for their glory, as indeed Eadburh herself did at Winchester, her move to Pershore has none of these overtones. In Osbert's account, Count Æthelwold's building of a new chapel then requires some relic to be properly blessed. Æthelwold's actions in acquiring the relics of Eadburh are presented as righteous, but the abbess, Ælfgifu, is the subject of some criticism. Osbert acknowledges that some people would accuse the abbess of greed, as she had provided the relics to Æthelwold for one hundred pounds, but Osbert declares that she was won over 'with prayer as much as with money'. Again, this hints at a Nunnaminster audience even for the Pershore section, as members of the community of monks were unlikely to have been among the 'many [...] who falsely accuse the abbess of avarice in tearing apart the aforesaid relics'.³⁸

On the other hand, Osbert is able to claim that this move was approved of by Eadburh. This episode illustrates the freedom that later hagiographers had to fashion the saint into an acceptable form – a saint dissatisfied with the move to Pershore would have punished either the abbess or the monks of Pershore, based on what saints had been known to do in the past.

³⁶ See, for example, Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

³⁷ *LE*, II: 53, pp. 145-148.

³⁸ "*tam prece quam precio coemit extortum*": "*Plures [...] sic abbatisse detestandam in predictarum distractione reliquiarum calumpniantur auariciam*", Riddyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 302.

Eadburh did not punish Ælfgifu; therefore, Eadburh approved the transaction. This reasoning may not have been so easily accepted by Ælfgifu's contemporaries, because Osbert's work also records that, initially, miracles declined in frequency at Winchester after the transfer. This decline might have been seen as an element of saintly disapproval. It is also possible that members of the community at Nunnaminster at the time of Osbert's writing still harboured some hard feelings about the removal of the relics, and he felt the need to defend the abbess' actions.

In contrast, Eadburh's performance of miracles at Pershore reveals that she was happy with the move, further legitimising Pershore's acquisition of her relics. Osbert's emphasis on the holy desires and devotion of Count Æthelwold also serves to show how greatly Eadburh was wanted in that place, whereas Nunnaminster may have been taking her for granted.

Ridyard concludes that Osbert was treading a fine line between the two monastic houses, Nunnaminster and Pershore:

It was Osbert's function to provide the Pershore relics with a history: he was to explain and to justify the claims of the Pershore monks to be equal sharers in the patronage and in the glory of the principal saint of one of England's leading nunneries. And he was to do so without calling down the wrath of that nunnery. It was a delicate diplomatic exercise, and its result was a neat but unconvincing compromise – a Winchester Life, with a Pershore appendix and a happily-ever-after ending.³⁹

Another way to look at it is that while Pershore laid claim to both Eadburh's relics and her miracles, as seen in Osbert's text and in other places (William of Malmesbury notes that some of Eadburh's relics are in Pershore),⁴⁰ Nunnaminster had the prior claim, and was not going to let go of her. Though miracles had initially declined in Winchester, they did revive. The two religious houses both possessed relics, and so some form of shared custody was required. Osbert's work explains both how the relics came to Pershore and how Eadburh continued her work in the two places.

³⁹ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 36-37.

⁴⁰ Malmesbury, *GRA*, II: 217, p. 400-403.

The communities for which Osbert was writing thus influenced what he included in his narrative, and how the saint was to be presented. The actions of St Eadburh could be given different explanations as he required to fit them into the text, altering her identity, because there was no living memory of the events in question to negotiate. Therefore Eadburh could be depicted as performing miracles at both Pershore and Winchester, as showing approval to both religious houses, without causing trouble between the two guardians of her relics. The text therefore suggests that Eadburh's identity has altered. While she is initially shown as turning her back on the community at Nunnaminster, she later includes them under her protection.

The Wilton Chronicle: Romancing Edith

As with Goscelin's *Legend of Edith*, the *Wilton Chronicle* appears to have been written in the first instance for the nuns at Wilton. While the *Chronicle* has been interrogated in a variety of ways over the last hundred years or so by scholars studying saints, by those interested in the history of women's houses, and by those focused on writings in Middle English, it has almost always been studied as a particular example of one type of genre, which does not do it justice. As a hagiography, it is described as an adaptation of Goscelin's *Legend of Edith*. As a history of Wilton, much of the information has been regarded as suspect, unverifiable.⁴¹ As Middle English poetry, it leaves much to be desired, showing no great skill.

However, the *Wilton Chronicle* is not purely history, nor literature, nor hagiography, but a combination of all three. It is a fifteenth-century attempt to revive interest not only in Wilton's saint, but also in the house itself. Although addressed to the nuns, the author of the *Chronicle* appears to have had a much wider audience in mind. Thus, the text reads more like a history and a romance in the opening sections than like the recollection of a holy life. Indeed, the emphasis on the succession of kings and their contributions to the foundation and upkeep of the nunnery in the foundation section suggests an attempt to interest other potential donors, both royalty and those who wished to be associated with royal power. The hagiographical section similarly shows an interest in the ruling houses, Anglo-Saxon, Danish,

⁴¹ Except Wiesje F. Nijenhuis, 'The Wilton Chronicle as a Historical Source', *Revue Benedictine*, 115:2 (2005), 370-399.

and Norman, while also containing the traditional corpus of hagiographical miracles.

However, even here the narrative tendency is strong, and long passages of speech which are attributed to the saint have no extant sources.

The author of the *Wilton Chronicle* appears to have been an educated person, someone who has carefully researched and brought together information from a wide range of sources. These sources are acknowledged in the manuscript, both in the margins of the pages and in a list of *auctoritates* between the *Chronicle* and the *Life of St Etheldrede*, which appears to be composed by the same author. These authorities include all the most famous historians of the English and British: Bede, Nennius, Gildas, William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, Archdeacon Walter of Oxford, and Marianus Scotus. Goscelin's *Legend of Edith* is also acknowledged, and there are other references harder to trace.⁴² The majority of the historical section appears to have been extracted from John Trevisa's late 1380s English translation of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon*, which, as Dockray-Miller has pointed out, 'raises interesting questions about the possible contents of Wilton Abbey's library'.⁴³ The *Wilton Chronicle* was not merely compiled by accretion, however. The author rearranged his sources in the creation of his work, structuring it carefully for an easier narrative flow, including the sections extracted from various histories.

The *Chronicle* opens with 800 lines which recount the history of the founding of Wilton and trace the royal patrons and benefactors down to Edgar, Edith's father. This firmly places not only the saint, but also the community, in a history which stretches back to Egbert of Wessex (*d.* 839), who 'knytte' together four of the seven English kingdoms. The text discusses briefly the five 'moner' (l. 46) of people that were living in Britain: the 'Bretones', the Picts, Scots, Irish and the 'Denmarkes', which are further divided into the Saxons, Jutes and English. This takes us to the arrival of 'Wyllyam Bastard' who 'put þe Saxsones a-ȝeyn in to thraldom & wo' (ll. 64, 69). However, we are rapidly brought to the main point of the text, as it goes on to tell how, once he had established peace, Egbert set up a religious house at Wilton for his

⁴² Horstmann, *Wilton Chronicle*, pp. 112-13.

⁴³ Mary Dockray-Miller, 'Historical Sources of the Middle English Verse Life of St Æthelthryth', *ANQ*, 20:2 (2007) 8-11, p. 10, 11.

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sister Æthelburh, wife of the Earl of Wilton, and twelve other women, in 830: 'Þis Religiose house was foundyd þere' (l. 150). From this early identification with the Wilton house (a chantry at its earliest point) every king of Wessex is discussed with reference to what he did, or failed to do, for the nunnery. Egbert's son, Æthelwulf, being a religious man who gave one tenth of his land to the church, increased the lands belonging to Wilton, and thus became the second founder (ll. 178-97, 233). The history of Wessex is continued up to the time of King Alfred (r. 871-89), mentioning both good and bad kings, before the text returns to the list of the royal founders of Wilton, whether they were sinful or not: Egbert, Æthelwulf, Æthelbald, Æthelberht, and Æthelred.

Alfred is the subject of the next 300 lines: his interaction with the Danes, the near loss of his kingdom, and his return to power. Throughout he is depicted as a noble and holy man, much honoured by all. According to this text, he built five abbeys, establishing a new foundation at Wilton, sixty-three years after Edgar first built the priory there (ll. 606-17). The other abbeys were at Pollesworth, Whitby, Shaftesbury, and Glastonbury (ll. 642-61). Alfred is the first of the new list of founders, followed by Edward the Elder, Æthelstan, Edmund, and Eadwig. As with the first list of five founders, their personal lives do not affect their importance in providing Wilton with lands and income. Eadwig, in particular, is said to have fallen into 'spousebreche' on the first day of his reign and hated monastics to the point where he gave the abbey of Malmesbury to his clerks. Yet he still increased the lands and income of Wilton for his mother's sake (ll. 742-61).

This then brings the text to Edgar (r. 959-75), who was the next really worthy king, according to this chronicler (ll. 786-1030). At this point, the tone of the text changes. While it is heavily dependent on Malmesbury or the *Cronica Cistrensis* for the content, the text is no longer describing the founding of the religious house, but becomes a romance which will lead eventually to the birth and life of St Edith.⁴⁴ Thus, the author has rearranged the matter found in the chronicles into a stronger narrative structure. On the night Edgar is born, Archbishop Dunstan has a vision in which he hears an angel proclaiming peace to the

⁴⁴ This idea of the romance has also shown up in Dockray-Miller, *Saints Edith and Æthelthryth*, pp. 19-21.

English while Edgar lives. Following the angel, the language echoes that of Christ's youth in the Luke 2:40:

So heylyche encresset þis kyng in alle godenesse
And in so gret prosperyte he encressed also
And so meche pese and trewthe in his tyme wesse,
Þat nomone to other wold mys-do. (ll. 822-825)⁴⁵

Edgar is described as brave and wise, so much so that other kings and rulers paid him homage as a 'fulle monfulle mon', even though 'he was of stature so lyte' (ll. 834, 846). There are also suggestions at this point of Middle English romances: Edgar's interactions with the Scottish king (ll.834-81) are very similar to events in *Sir Orfeo* or *Havelock the Dane*, and the romance becomes an Arthurian quest as Edgar travels to Wilton.

At that critical point, there is a lacuna in the manuscript. Twelve pages, or 980 lines, are missing according to the editor, Horstmann: lines which would have described the wedding of Edgar and Wulfthryth and the birth of Edith, followed by Wulfthryth's retirement back into Wilton and Edith's choice, at two years old, of the sacred life over the secular.

The *vita* of Edith which follows the missing quire – while reverting back in subject matter to hagiography – is a paraphrasing, rather than translation, of Goscelin's eleventh-century work. While the events are similar or the same and presented in much the same order, they contain more detail, more narrative, more dialogue, and more courtly-literature qualities. The break with the historical chronicle style is not total, but it is noticeable. Kings still get mentioned in relation to what they do for the house at Wilton and for their relationship with Edith, both before and after her death, but they have become much more background characters, sometimes only there to provide dating for miracles. The glosses provided for some of Goscelin's biblical references, however, suggest a readership whose education has fallen from the levels of when Wilton was a royal nunnery.

The distance in time from Edith's life and the lack of active memory have allowed the author

⁴⁵ Compare Malmesbury, *GRA*, II: 148, pp. 238-241.

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to considerably reshape Edith, and in so doing to change the nature of the relationship between the community and the saint. The history of the community has been thoroughly researched, as established by the references to chronicles and other works listed both in the margins and at the end of the text. The author is ensuring that he can demonstrate the 'historical' parts of the text, thus gaining authority over the less verifiable areas. Thus, while he has no proof of how Edith reacted when the box with her clothes was set alight, the author is able to conjure up the scene, people it with characters who do not appear in Goscelin, provide Edith with a prayer, and the careless maid with fear, trembling, and then joyful surprise when she finds the clothes unharmed. This dramatisation could not be contested by Edith's contemporaries, because there were no first-hand witnesses left alive and so the direct chain of oral memory had been severed. Instead, this version of the episode serves to reinforce the story behind the box kept as a relic, as a point of continuity with the distant past.

The author further ties the text to an audience of Wilton nuns in his claim that they can find more information 'in 3our mynymenty's' (l. 697). Being written in English, however, also means that the narrative would be accessible to those outside of the convent, and so could form part of a literate lay-person's library. Given its very secular-romance style, it appears to be written for an audience with an expectation of entertainment, perhaps educated lay-women, perhaps a widow or group of widows who had retired to the convent.

Wilton had a long and royal history, as was so clearly demonstrated in the opening lines of the *Chronicle*. In Edith's time, King Edgar employed two continental scholars to educate her. Edgar's successors, including St Edith's half-brother Æthelred (r. 978-1016), also granted lands to Wilton. It was at his request that Edith was elevated to sainthood by Archbishop Dunstan. The Danish king Cnut, according to Goscelin, was particularly devoted to the cult of Edith. His donations included an elaborate golden shrine to house her partially uncorrupted body, and he is said to have shown great respect to St Edith during his visits to the nunnery.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Horstman, *Wilton Chronicle*, ll. 3491-3634; compare with Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 77-79.

Throughout its history, the community at Wilton was drawn from the highest social echelons. A number of royal and aristocratic women were educated there during the late Anglo-Saxon period. Edith Godwinson, wife of Edward the Confessor, was one such person; she returned there for a time during the troubles of her husband's reign, and she paid for the rebuilding of the church at Wilton (according to the earliest *vita* of Edward the Confessor, as an expression of her gratitude for the fact that Wilton had given her an education that 'made her fit to be the queen of England'). Godwinson's niece Gunnhild was also a nun at Wilton, having been placed there for safekeeping at the time of the Norman Conquest. Another queenly benefactor of Wilton who was educated there was Edith-Matilda, daughter of Queen Margaret of Scotland and a direct descendent of the Anglo-Saxon royal line. In 1101, Matilda married Henry I, bolstering his claim to the English throne.⁴⁷

Wilton continued to receive benefactions from kings and royal women during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but these appear to have ceased during the fourteenth century: Edward I (*d.* 1307) is the last recorded royal patron of the nunnery. Throughout the fourteenth century, the convent appears to have been in financial difficulties. Not coincidentally, perhaps, the reports of bishops' visitations throughout the century complained that the nunnery's affairs were not being competently administered by the abbess, and that community discipline was lax. This chiefly meant that the nuns were not observing strict enclosure and were ignoring prohibitions against the ownership of private property, as well as entertaining themselves with 'superstitious plays and games'. Communal life at Wilton seems to have been restored to regularity by 1425 (as the archbishop reported after a visitation), but there is no indication that the nunnery's financial position had improved.⁴⁸

Successive royal grants of land had meant that, in theory, Wilton was wealthy. It managed to retain most of its lands after the Norman Conquest, and in the Domesday Survey of 1086 it is recorded as owning 231 hides of land in Wiltshire, and another 12 in other counties. The

⁴⁷ Malmesbury, *GRA*, V: 393, pp. 714-717; v: 418, pp. 754-759.

⁴⁸ 'Houses of Benedictine nuns: Abbey of Wilton', *A History of the County of Wiltshire: Volume 3* (1956), pp. 231-242. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=36533>> [accessed: 30 November 2006].

gross income from all this property amounted to £246 15s, the highest of any nunnery in England.⁴⁹ However, to balance this wealth, Wilton had expensive obligations. Some of its land was held by knight service, as a noble house, rather than straight-forward donations. This meant that the king was owed either five knights, or £5 scutage, through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the late thirteenth century, however, the income from the property began to decline, and by 1277 only one knight's fee was owed by the abbey. Wilton was also expected to provide maintenance for the boarders nominated by the king, and to entertain the king, queen, archbishop and other important visitors, and to receive and support nuns nominated to it by these same people.⁵⁰

But, while on paper the abbey remained wealthy, reports to the Bishop reveal that it struggled throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Possibly this was due to mismanagement by successive abbesses, but the economic decline of the town did not help, and at least some of the nunnery's misfortunes were a result of sheer bad luck. In 1299, for instance, a fire destroyed some buildings which had only recently been built. So, by the early fifteenth century, this important English convent, which once enjoyed the patronage of kings, was struggling with a decline in numbers and income. The *Chronicle* must, in part, have been written to generate interest in the house, both out of a sense of pride on the part of the nuns, and also perhaps for a wider audience.

Internal evidence dates the *Wilton Chronicle* to the reign of Henry V (1413-22).⁵¹ Henry is known for promoting local saints during his reign, possibly to generate a sense of national pride and thus provide financial and spiritual support for his war against France. He is recorded as attributing his victory at Agincourt, in 1415, to the help of English saints, and requested that the Archbishop raise the status of the feasts of St George, St Dunstan, St Chad, and St Winifred. He made a pilgrimage on foot to Winifred's shrines at Shrewsbury and Holywell in 1416. Given the interest from the king in English saints and the overall problem with finances experienced by Wilton, this appears to have been an opportune time to renew

⁴⁹ 'Houses of Benedictine nuns: Abbey of Wilton'

⁵⁰ 'Houses of Benedictine nuns: Abbey of Wilton'.

⁵¹ Horstmann, *Wilton Chronicle*, pp. 111-2.

interest in Wilton's very own royal saint. The close association of royalty with Wilton in the past offered an appropriate basis for the revival of Edith's cult. Even more fortuitously, Edith's feast day was celebrated on the same day as Henry V's birthday, the 16th of September.

Henry V was also a prime mover in the development of the use of English as a legal language.⁵² The collections of specifically English saints and the rise of the number of saints' *vitae* translated into English over the course of the fifteenth century are probably attributable, at least in part, to this improved status of the English language, of which the *Wilton Chronicle* is a product. While the language then makes Edith's Life and Miracles accessible to the laity, the Englishing of the saint would probably not have distanced it from a more royal interest. Unfortunately, however, there is no evidence to show that Henry V noticed St Edith. While he left land and money to other English shrines, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne reports that he left nothing to Edith or her shrine in his will.⁵³ There does, however, seem to have been an effect among the laity. While Edith's feast day had been commemorated by a small number of Benedictine monks' houses prior to the fifteenth century, with no noticeable increase among religious houses after the *Chronicle* appeared, St Edith's name, recorded next to September 16, became almost as ubiquitous as St Æthelthryth's in calendars owned by the laity, and in particular, lay women, through the fifteenth century.⁵⁴

Another factor that may have influenced the fifteenth-century rise of Edith's popularity is that in 1425, the Bishop of Salisbury granted a 40 day indulgence to all who visited St Edith's shrine on her feast day. The bishop, one John Chandler (Bp 1417-26), had previously been a Wilton chaplain,⁵⁵ and this granting of an indulgence appears to be related to Wilton's attempt to revive its fortunes. Thus, the Bishop is a potential candidate for the authorship, or

⁵² C. Allmand, *Henry V*, new edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 421; Tim William Machan, *English in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 161-5.

⁵³ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Outdoing the Daughters of Syon?: Edith of Wilton and Representation of Female Community in Fifteenth-Century England', in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Wogan-Browne and others (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000), pp. 393-410 (p. 396-97, n. 10) – see also Allmand, *Henry V*, p. 7.

⁵⁴ See, for example, the 'Fitzherbert Book of Hours', Dunedin, Dunedin Public Library, Reed MS 5, fol. 9 v, and the fifteenth century Psalter, Wellington, Alexander Turnbull Library, MSR-01, fol. 5.

⁵⁵ Wogan-Browne, 'Outdoing the Daughters of Syon?', p. 397, n. 11.

at least the impulse behind the creation, of the *Chronicle*.

The *Wilton Chronicle*, then, can be seen as a textual response to the decline in interest in the Wilton nunnery, and its combination of genres, presented in English, allows it to revive that interest by being read or listened to by a wide range of people. Although ostensibly addressing a Wilton audience, and creating within the listeners a sense of community and continuity through references to their official records and the relics they possess, the text was also able to reach beyond the addressed audience to others interested in history and romance and to entertain while recounting the life of a saint. Therefore the audiences affected how the saint was presented – her identity has been molded to allow for different genres and interests.

Different Perspectives on Æthelthryth of Ely: Twelfth-Century Ely and Fifteenth-Century Wilton

Not all the Anglo-Saxon female saints were patrons of women's houses. St Æthelthryth had founded Ely as a double monastery in 673, and remained its most important saint, joined by her sister and nieces, even after its refoundation as a male Benedictine house in the tenth century. The earliest record we have of the life and miracles of Æthelthryth (*d.* 679) is by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (completed 731). Since then, *vitae* of Æthelthryth have been written and rewritten many times. The identity of the saint as written by her community is here especially interesting, as tensions which existed between a male community and its female saints, especially saints whose virginal bodies remained undecayed, can be seen in the miracle-stories found in the *vitae* of Æthelthryth.⁵⁶

By comparing the *Liber Eliensis* – written in Ely and completed some time between 1170 and 1177 – with the *Life of St Etheldrede* which is attached to the *Wilton Chronicle* and written in the same hand around 1420,⁵⁷ the contrast in the different audiences and their effect on the works can be seen. The *Liber Eliensis* was written for the monks of Ely, recording the deeds of their saint and revealing her to be an on-going active presence, while the *Life* is written two and a half centuries later for a female audience a long way from Ely. While these two works are

⁵⁶ See, for example, Virginia Blanton-Whetsell, 'Tota integra, tota incorrupta: The Shrine of St. Æthelthryth as Symbol of Monastic Autonomy', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32:2 (2002), 227-67.

⁵⁷ Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, p. xxii-xxiii; Horstmann, *Wilton Chronicle*, p. 282.

both based on similar sources, the Æthelthryth as depicted at Wilton is quite different from the Æthelthryth represented at Ely.

In the *Liber Eliensis*, Æthelthryth is shown to have made, and to continue to make, her own choices and decisions. Reluctant to marry, she only agrees to do so when she receives the foreknowledge 'that she was to be crowned with a glorious laurel-crown of chastity all the more glorious in view of the encumbrance of her marriage'.⁵⁸ She is active in withstanding her husbands' natural desires, and after holding out against Ecgfrith, she eventually persuades him to let her go. Her removal from Coldingham to Ely becomes a chase sequence, because Ecgfrith reconsiders his decision. Æthelthryth manages to evade him, with the help of various miracles, and on reaching Ely, she gathers other like-minded people to her, until she has set up a mixed community of men and women, all devoted to 'obedience, a love of divine worship and the guarding of the beauty of the house of God with all watchfulness'.⁵⁹ The text also suggests that Ely became a site of learning, as 'a great many people vied to live under her rule; they also handed their daughters over to be educated by her.'⁶⁰ However, her only reported speech in the *Liber Eliensis* comes from Bede's much earlier work, when Æthelthryth explains that she deserved to have a tumour on her neck, because she used to be proud of wearing necklaces in her youth.⁶¹ In the *Liber Eliensis*, Æthelthryth is shown to be a strong and decisive woman, but she is not given a voice.

In stark contrast, the Wilton *Life of St Etheldrede* depicts Æthelthryth as a very passive player in the story. There is no sign that she has any role in deciding whether or not to be married, and it is her husbands, both godly and upright men, who are determined to preserve her chastity. Her first husband, Tonbert 'loued hurre as durelyche as his owne lyff, / and kepte fulle clene hurre virgynyte' (ll. 159-160). Ecgfrith also starts out that way, and although he later tries to bribe Wilfrid to persuade his wife 'to turne hurre hert otherweys', his excuse is that he needs an heir (ll. 185-196). Ecgfrith's decision to let Æthelthryth go into the nunnery

⁵⁸ *LE*, I: 4, p. 17.

⁵⁹ *LE*, I: 15 p. 44.

⁶⁰ *LE*, I: 15, p. 42.

⁶¹ *LE*, I: 20, p. 50.

is also shown as a noble and self-sacrificing act, completely omitting the fact that it allows him to marry again. Ecgfrith then commits Æthelthryth to another man, Bishop Wilfrid, who sets up the nunnery at Ely, and installs Æthelthryth there as abbess (ll. 245-256, 297-304). The men in the Wilton *vita* play a much larger role in making Æthelthryth's choices for her. In contrast to the *Liber Eliensis*, however, Æthelthryth has several speeches in the Wilton *vita*; in this representation of her, it is through her words that she effects changes in her life. This is possibly due to a change in the ideas of the role of women (particularly queens and abbesses) in the later Middle Ages, and the increasing resistance to their participation in affairs of state.

The *Liber Eliensis* was compiled at Ely by a monk from the monastery and written in Latin in the late-twelfth century.⁶² The compiler set out, in three books, all the history of Ely that was available to him. He derived this material, he says, from 'histories, chronicles, English and Latin writs, wills, and the reports of the faithful', bringing together diverse accounts and from them creating a cohesive whole.⁶³ His stated intent in the Prologue is

that matters which deserve to be made the subject of preaching should not be left unwritten as if unknown, or wasted away and effaced by old age. For when the philosopher, or good historiographer, who has been long awaited, attempts to take up his pen, there will be many places in which he will not find raw material.⁶⁴

This indicates the writer's deliberate attempt to compile the sources which the author had available to him at the time, a significant undertaking. Further on, as he describes the geographical situation of Ely, he also comments on its spiritual situation, giving another slant on the purpose of this work:

The Isle is absolutely free from anyone's jurisdiction and power, with the consequence that neither a bishop nor any tax-official may enter without the invitation of the monks, or may presume to disturb the property of the lady saint.⁶⁵

The evidence that Ely has always been free from the jurisdiction of both church and secular powers was important at the time of writing. While the first book is focused on the life and

⁶² Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, pp. xxii-xxiii.

⁶³ *LE*, Prologue, p. 1

⁶⁴ *LE*, Prologue, p. 1

⁶⁵ *LE*, Preface, p. 6

after-life of Æthelthryth, charters occupy much of the second and third books, illustrating the concern the monks felt, not only about secular powers imposing on them, but also about the increasing threat of episcopal authority.

Ely had undergone many changes by the end of the twelfth century: following the Norman Conquest, the minster was rebuilt on a grand scale, until, in 1109, Ely became the seat of a bishop. As Fairweather points out, this 'immediately caused serious financial problems, as the monk's resources had to be shared with an expensive episcopal establishment.'⁶⁶ The necessity of sharing resources and the oppression inflicted by the Norman rule probably lie behind many of the warning miracles recorded in the *Liber Eliensis*. The land belonging to Ely is constantly under pressure from outside sources, including local sheriffs and thoughtless or greedy bishops. Thus the *Liber Eliensis* contains a number of tales about people misusing Ely's resources, followed swiftly by punishment, usually fatal.

The charters indicate the monks' concern with finances at that time and are largely based around rents owed to them and their tax-free status as monks of Ely. The *Liber Eliensis* was used as a depository for the various writs, in order to keep them in one place, easily accessible to those looking to back up claims to land. It was written to reassure the monks, and as a warning to those who might impose on St Æthelthryth and her lands. Interspersed through the legal charters are other stories of a spiritual guardianship, containing warnings for those who did not heed the charters. Thus, in Book III, there is a chapter entitled 'About a certain man who did not wish to hold the feast of St. Æthelthryth'.⁶⁷ This story is one of the 'very few in number' recounted, as 'the listener is not to expect that all the achievements of this lady saint can be held in our memory', but the author/compiler includes it because it is 'a delightful miracle of the kind to delight pious ears with glorious exultation'. A parishioner who refuses to celebrate St Æthelthryth's feast day falls into a hedge and is stabbed in the ribs by a stake, which breaks off. So he begins 'to putrefy internally' and is in great pain. Physicians cause more harm than good until finally, 'on the return of the feast of the holy

⁶⁶ Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, p. xiii-xiv

⁶⁷ *LE*, III: 58, pp. 373-74 for the following paragraph.

virgin' a year later, he is persuaded to be brought to the tomb of the saint. Repenting, and promising to keep her feast every year from then on, he returns home, and the wound miraculously starts to itch, until the skin over the stake and putrefying matter breaks open, and it all pours out.

And so, rejoicing and full of amazement that the cause of his suffering had been cast out, he immediately went back to the church, gave thanks to the lady saint, reported the happening, and afterwards returned to his own district, carrying with him the piece of wood as evidence of a very great miracle, to advance the proclamation of the glory of God and St Æthelthryth.⁶⁸

There are other similar miracles recorded, with chapter titles such as 'Who the men were who gave surety for the bishop with regard to the money taken from the church; and how miserably events turned out for them'; 'With what severity the Lord avenged the injuries inflicted on his beloved virgin Æthelthryth'; and 'Once more, how God wreaked vengeance on the enemies of the blessed Æthelthryth'.⁶⁹ Many of the people in these miracle tales do not repent, and so their punishment is more severe and often fatal. Æthelthryth is shown to be a very active guardian of her lands and monks.

Thus, the continuing physical presence of Æthelthryth, the place of Ely, the lands surrounding it, and the people belonging to it were all of great importance both to the compiler and to the intended audience of the Book of Ely, as the church and monastery struggled to maintain their place and role in the turbulent twelfth century.

The *Wilton Chronicle* and its attendant *Life of St Etheldrede*, written in the early fifteenth century, were the products of very different cultural and audience expectations. The Hundred Years War was well under way, the Norman conquerors now thoroughly English.⁷⁰ The French language was being replaced by the English, even in the higher circles, and especially as the language of creative writing.⁷¹ Male dominance in society had become more

⁶⁸ *LE*, III: 58, p. 374.

⁶⁹ *LE*, III: 92, p. 415; III: 119, p. 455; III: 120, p. 457.

⁷⁰ George Holmes, *The Later Middle Ages: 1272 -1485*, ed. by Christopher Brooke and Denis Mack Smith, *A History of England*, Vol 3 (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1962), p. 196-97.

⁷¹ M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), p.185.

rigorous. Noblewomen were expected to do what they were told. Therefore, the *Æthelthryth* depicted in the works of the time should be expected to be different. And while the *Wilton Chronicle* engages with some land disputes which are relevant to Wilton, the *Life of St Etheldrede* is concerned with a saint from a very different place. Thus Ely's claim to disputed lands has no place in this text.

Like the *Wilton Chronicle*, the *Life of St Etheldrede* is not just a translation of a saint's *vita*, however. Written in English verse, it is in part a work of entertainment, possibly aimed at a wider audience than simply the nuns of Wilton. As with its companion piece, the *Chronicle*, there are elements of a romance in this *vita*, especially in the search for a suitable tomb for the relocation of the saint. Here the doctor described in Bede's version, Cynefrith, is given a new role. He is called in by Bishop Wilfrid and *Æthelthryth*'s sister, the abbess Seaxburh, to find a stone from which to carve a tomb. Such a stone cannot be found in the vicinity of Ely, so Cynefrith searches far afield, to no avail. Exhausted, he sleeps, and in his sleep an otherworldly woman appears to him, revealing the location of the perfect stone. In the morning the prophesied stone is where she said, but it was too heavy to be moved. As Cynefrith and his men sit in despair by the side of the road, a man appears, driving a cart. The carter tells them that a mysterious woman in a dream commanded him to take the stone to Ely, and paid him with a ring. Rejoicing, Cynefrith, the good carter and the stone return to Ely. On their arrival, the carter proffers the ring to Seaxburh and, behold, it turns out to be *Æthelthryth*'s professional ring (ll. 605-801). This whole episode sounds very much like a search narrative from a French romance, with visions of women, discoveries of treasure, and payment with important tokens.

Thus, another possible reason for the differences is that while the *Liber Eliensis* is a chronicle, a political statement, the *Life* is a work of art. This is further backed up by the languages in which the two works were written. The Latin of the *Liber Eliensis* was the universal language of Western European scholars and clerics. Thus, the chronicle could be read across the Continent. The *Wilton Chronicle* and the *Life of St Etheldrede*, in contrast, were written in English, which made them accessible for the lower classes, as good stories for reading out

loud. While this meant that these texts could inform and entertain the masses, English was a very local language, and would not have been read outside of the country.

The two texts differ even more when dealing with Æthelthryth's after-life and miracles. Only two specific miracles are recorded as occurring in both versions of the *vita*: the finding of the stone for Æthelthryth's tomb, and the narrative of the curious canon. In the *Life of St Etheldrede*, both these miracles have been substantially altered from the *Liber Eliensis*. The search for the stone, as has already been discussed, was made into a more elaborate tale, while the canon who tried to see the undecayed body of the saint is given a much happier ending. In the *Liber Eliensis*, secular canons control the church and lands during the time between the Danish attacks and the refoundation of Ely. One of these canons becomes curious to see if Æthelthryth is truly whole, and, ignoring various warnings, he thrusts a lighted candle through the hole in the coffin made by a Dane. He is struck blind, and soon after dies of the plague, together with his wife and children, as do the other people who were with him at the time.⁷² This plague is definitely seen as part of the punishment for his audacity, inflicted by Æthelthryth.

The priest is also struck blind in the *Life of St Etheldrede*, but he hears a voice reassuring him that the saint is indeed whole. While he is to remain blind for the rest of his life, there is no indication that he will suffer any further punishment. This miracle, and its different outcomes, is illustrative of the role of the community in the production of both the text and the identity of the saint. While it was important for the monks of Ely to be assured of the physical, undecayed, presence of Æthelthryth within her stone tomb, it was also necessary, for the sake of their souls, that they should not be tempted to look. The punishment of the canon reveals that the saint is a powerful force, not to be tested.

On the other hand, the leniency found in the *Life of St Etheldrede* is also found when comparing the miracles of Edith and Wulfthryth in the *Wilton Chronicle* with those in the *vitae* written by Goscelin. Where evildoers are struck dead in Goscelin's versions, in the *Chronicle*

⁷² *LE*, I: 49, p. 80-82.

they are punished with illnesses until they repent, and then they are forgiven and healed. The mercy which the saint shows probably has something to do with a change in how saints and their roles were perceived. When saints were needed to protect the land and church, their lessons were backed by force. However, by the time the *Wilton Chronicle* and the *Life* were written, repentance and forgiveness have become more centrally significant issues for the Church. At the same time, the *Life of St Etheldrede*, being written for a female community, many miles away from Ely, has no need to warn the readers against testing the saint. Thus, there are different expectations of saints, altered by time, distance and the identity of the community.

There is only one other miracle described in detail in the *Life of St Etheldrede*, that of a dead boy revived at the time of her translation (ll.896-921). This miracle does not appear in any of the other surviving sources. The only other references to miracles in the *Life* are simply to general healing:

Mony sekemen hadden þere hurre hele
& restorynge of hurre lemys þey hadden þer also,
And blynde men & crokyd mony & fele,
Ðe whiche þedur come, holle & sounde þey went þerfro. (ll. 593-6)

Æthelthryth heals the blind, crippled, deaf, dumb, and the generally sick. At her translation, along with the dead boy who came back to life when placed on her new tomb, nine blind men are healed, and seven cripples. The lack of sources for these actions suggests either that the writer was working from another text no longer extant or, more probably, that the author was fleshing out what little he knew about Æthelthryth with more traditional healings that saints were known to do.⁷³

Another important result which the *Life of St Etheldrede* displays in the distance from Ely is the record of the relics. The *Liber Eliensis* talks about the miracles performed through contact with Æthelthryth's shroud and the wooden coffin in which she was first buried, but there is

⁷³ See Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, Ch 5, esp. pp. 116-20.

no mention of their continuing presence in the community.⁷⁴ Presumably these relics were lost in the Danish raids of the tenth century, or under the canons' occupation of the monastery. On the other hand, the spring which arose 'from the place in which the body of the virgin had first been buried, [...] for evermore continues ceaselessly to flow', with the author implying that the miracles associated with it are contemporary with his writing.⁷⁵

In contrast, the *Life of St Etheldrede* records that the coffin, Æthelthryth's clothes 'bothe most & lest', and the ring with which the carter was paid to shift the tomb-stone were still present in Ely:

Puse relekus ben 3et ry3te folle of grace
And 3euen hele & grace to mony a mone.
And gret pilgrimage is 3et to þat place,
In gret help and in grete hele to mony one (ll. 954-7).

This would suggest that the author had not actually been to Ely at the time he wrote the bulk of this poem. To one who was reading other *vitae* about saints, the continuing existence of these relics could be assumed. If Edith's relics were still present in Wilton in the fifteenth century, then someone who did not know the details of Ely's occupation by canons could be excused for thinking that such important relics would also still be available for veneration and healing. That the author of the *Life of St Etheldrede* had not been to Ely until after the *Life* was written is supported by the end of the poem. The *Life* concludes neatly with a prayer to the saint for heavenly joys in the life to come. However, this is followed, in a new hand, by the beginning of an episode which occurred before Æthelthryth ever reached Ely: the chase when Ecgfrith changed his mind about letting her retreat to a nunnery. This episode contradicts the main author's earlier depiction of King Ecgfrith, but could be explained by the personal experience of a second author who had visited Ely:

A noþur myracle y þenke here to pyte
Ry3te here yn þis same place,
Þe whyche y say at Hely y-wrete,
Whenne y on pylgrymage laste þer was,

⁷⁴ *LE*, I: 29, 30, p. 63.

⁷⁵ *LE*, I:31, p. 63; III: 116-118, pp., 450-55.

Community, Audience, Text

As y redde yn hurre story boke

By helpe of þe sexteyne þat was þer þat day. (ll. 1110-5).

Given that this section is written in a different hand, and the fact that its author needed help to read Ely's miracle book, it seems unlikely that he was the same well-read compiler who brought together the range of chronicle material and other Latin sources to create the *Wilton Chronicle* or the bulk of the *Life of St Etheldrede*. Thus, it would appear that the original work was continued by someone who was less educated, but able to go on pilgrimage, perhaps as a result of having read the original *Life of St Etheldrede*.

The *Wilton Chronicle*, while recording the history of Wilton from the beginning, focuses on the lives of St Edith and her mother, Wulfthryth, the two local Wessex saints. It is, therefore, unclear why a *vita* of Æthelthryth, an East Anglian saint, would be attached to the *vita* of a Wessex saint, other than the obvious connection of royal virgin saints. One possibility is that together they provide two different role-models of virgins: Edith provides the example of the virgin who never goes out into the world, whereas Æthelthryth maintains her virginity despite marriages to royal men, tries the pleasures of the world, and prefers the austerity of a holy life. Edith is the model for those who will remain nuns, while Æthelthryth is a model for those who are destined for political alliances. In the *Life of St Etheldrede*, the preservation of Æthelthryth's virginity is the decision of the men. Her role is to encourage the men to holiness. It is through speech that she persuades Ecgfrith towards good works. Whereas, in other versions of her *vita*, Æthelthryth has a hard time persuading Ecgfrith to let her withdraw to Coldingham, her words in the Wilton version change Ecgfrith's mind and he permits her to go into the nunnery. However, he does not simply let her go, but instead commits her to Bishop Wilfrid's care, and it is Wilfrid who then decides that Æthelthryth should not stay in Coldingham, but should found the abbey at Ely (ll. 253-60, 297-305). The women are shown to be under the authority of the men, but able to direct their ideas through her speech. This is something that the members of the audience of the *Wilton Chronicle* and the *Life of St Etheldrede* could emulate, using their positions to encourage good works and respect for the monasteries.

Thus, the intended audience has a significant effect on the retelling of Æthelthryth's life and on her identity. Time affects how women were expected to behave, and Wilton in the fifteenth century is that much more removed from the Anglo-Saxon times, when women presided over double monasteries. A strong Anglo-Saxon founder, female or not, was a point of pride for a monastery in the early period following the Norman Conquest, especially at Ely, which was one of the areas which held out longest against the Normans and was the seat of further rebellions. Even at the time of writing the *Liber Eliensis*, there still seems to have been tension between the English and the Normans, prompting Janet Fairweather to identify the compiler as being of English rather than Norman ancestry.⁷⁶ For the monks, coming to terms with the history of the monastery involves understanding how and why women in the past might have ruled over double monasteries. The Wilton writer, on the other hand, ignores such aberrations as double monasteries, and instead has the bishop found a nunnery. Royal women were the subjects of high romance, and so the saints are given roles accordingly. Their power lies in their speech, in persuading the men around them to behave as they should. Forgiveness has become more important than punishment, and healing is the focus of saints' *vitae*.

Place is also an issue with the type of miracles told. For the monks of Ely, the knowledge that their saint was on their side must have been comforting. People who interfered with the lands belonging to the church would be divinely punished, and even if one did not see the Norman sheriff struck dead, one was assured that he would get his just reward after his death. For the Wilton audience, the emphasis was more on the other traditional role of saints: healing. The fact that the miracles and relics told of in the *Life of St Etheldrede* did not correspond with those recorded at Ely did not make them any less important, or any less indicative of what the saint might do for someone in their hour of need.

Communities Writing their Saints

Communities authorise the writing and re-writing of their saints, affecting the identity of the saints as they are adjusted for a changed society. By commissioning a hagiographer to record

⁷⁶ Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, p. xv.

their saint, the community fixed the saint in a particular point in history. Those pieces commissioned within living memory of the saint's life had to be careful negotiations between the memories actively circulating in the community and the more general expectations of saintly activity. This negotiation between memory and expectation was further complicated by hagiographers who might need to recommend themselves to bishops, which led to the writer dedicating the *vita* to churchmen who were usually more conservative than the communal memories of the Anglo-Saxon saint who had lived among them as a person.

Time and distance elapsed allowed for greater input from the individual authors, as they no longer had to contend with the living memory. However, the concerns of the community remained in the foreground. The saint was still considered an integral part of the community, and so issues surrounding land and income appeared in the texts, with the saint showing her power to protect her people, identifying herself with them through the hagiographers' work. Such texts served as warnings to outsiders, and those who would steal land or income from the nunneries, that the saint would find and punish such intrusions, if not in this world then definitely in the hereafter. The texts also provided a reciprocal source of comfort for the community, keeping them secure in the knowledge that, even when circumstances did not appear to be favourable, the saint was still in control. The identity of the saint as protector and healer is strongly figured in these texts.

Commissioned *vitae* also served as signposts to the identifying markers of the community. They provided background for mnemonic devices, explaining the significance of the relics and at the same time supplied information for readings at the feast days. The existence of these markers and the circulation of the text within the community served to bind the community together, not only in the present. They also connected the nuns, the audience, to the community of the past, providing a sense of continuity and communal identity with each other and with the saint who had physically shared their space and their history.

As is to be expected, then, texts written about saints which do not belong to the community, such as the Wilton *Life of St Etheldrede*, are far less concerned with the protection of the

community. These texts are then able to engage with current ideas of sanctity more freely than the texts written about known local saints, where the body of tradition would have built up around them. Rather than killing to protect their land, the saints were represented with a greater focus on their identity as healers. Where punishment was necessary, it was no longer figured as swift and deadly, but rather allowed for repentance and healing. While still based on research, or at least hearsay, texts about other saints can be made both more conventional and more wondrous.⁷⁷ Thus, while the *Liber Eliensis*, following Bede, is quick to supply further examples of chaste husbands and wives, the *Life of St Etheldrede* simply praises the men for preserving Æthelthryth's virginity.⁷⁸ Because these miraculous chaste marriages happened long ago and far away, the author of the *Life* does not see any need to justify them.

Saints authorise the community, and in turn the community authorises the saint. Their identities are intertwined and can be read for both sides. However, distance in time allows for greater freedom for the depiction of the saint to conform to current ideals, although there is still a measure of restriction around the rewriting of a local saint. Those saints from further afield, however, are more able to be adjusted for the needs of the time. Thus, to get an idea of how the community viewed itself and its security, one needs to look at the more contemporary saints' *vitae*, while a sense of wider concerns can be seen in later or more geographically-distant *vitae*. Further research on individual religious communities will be able to utilise the *vitae* as sources for the interaction between the saints and their communities.

⁷⁷ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 14-15.

⁷⁸ *LE*, II: 5, p. 17-20; Horstmann, *Life of Etheldrede*, ll. 149-182.

PART B

Anglo-Saxon Female Saints and Ideas of Englishness

The first half of this thesis examined how Anglo-Saxon female saints' *vitae* worked within their communities to create a sense of the identity or personality of the saint, and how the *vitae* in turn were affected by audience for which they were written. The texts, both those commissioned by the communities which had a special interest in the saint and those found in more general collections, deal with multiple layers of identity, and the concept of the saint was affected by the expectations of the intended audiences. Not surprisingly, commissioned texts provide a much more complex view of the saint, and are also more informative about the community, while the collected *vitae*, both English and Latin, are restricted in their space, and therefore concentrate more closely on the essential features of the character of the saint which illustrate both how she fitted into the template of sanctity and how she was different from the other saints found in the same collection.

The second half of this thesis shifts its focus to explore how the depictions of the saints contribute to the development of larger ideas of ethnic and national identity in the same texts. English identity, as depicted in this thesis, is envisaged in part as developing from a sense of ethnic identity. However, in the case of England, Anglo-Saxon ethnicity is sometimes contrasted with, first, Danish or Viking groups, and then with the Norman Franks. During the Viking raids of the tenth century, a precursor to an English identity can be seen when the chroniclers and historians depict the blood-thirstiness of the invaders and the steadfastness of the people of the land. The Norman Conquest is not immediately imaged in the same way, but an idea of sharing the land with a foreign people can be seen in some texts. The ethnicity of the Normans becomes much more noticeable in the later texts, such as the *Wilton Chronicle*, where William the Conqueror is roundly condemned for his actions after invading, if not for the invasion itself.

'National Identity': A Heated Debate

The issue of whether or not 'national identity' existed in the Middle Ages, or any time prior to the French Revolution (1789), is one which splits scholars into two very separate camps. On the one hand, we find ranged many of the modern historians and sociologists, such as Benedict Anderson, and Krishan Kumar.¹ These scholars argue that national identity equates with Nationalism (note the capital letter) and so, rightly if we allow the equation, have decided that national identity is anachronistic for any time before the philosophies which burst forth into the French Revolution. On the other hand, we find many scholars who have studied the history of states, nations, countries or kingdoms (call them what you will) from Ancient Greece to medieval England. These historians see examples of national feeling, a developing identity which often cuts across ethnicities and language and does not depend entirely on the personality of the ruler. Important proponents of the issue of an English national identity include Sarah Foot, Patrick Wormald, R.R. Davies, and James Campbell.²

Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation is 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.'³ There is nothing, in this initial definition, which would exclude medieval states from being counted as 'nations'. The

¹ See for example: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn (London: Verso, 2006); John Edwards, *Language, Society and Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, ed. by Jeffery C. Alexander and Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Jonathan Hearn, *Rethinking Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

² James Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland*, 3 (1984), 131-50; R. R. Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100-1400: I. Identities', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 4 (1994), 1-20; R. R. Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100-1400: II. Names, Boundaries and Regnal Solidarities', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 5 (1995), 1-20; R. R. Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100-1400: IV. Language and Historical Mythology', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 7 (1997), 1-24; Sarah Foot, 'Remember, Forgetting and Inventing: Attitudes to the Past in England at the End of the First Viking Age', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 9 (1999), 185-200; Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Imagining a Medieval English Nation*, ed. by Kathy Lavezzo *Medieval Cultures*, 37 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Ian Short, 'Tam Angli Quam Franci: Self-Definition in Anglo-Norman England', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 18, 153-175; Patrick Wormald, 'Engla Lond: The Making of an Allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 7/1 (1994), 1-24; Patrick Wormald, 'Pre-Modern 'State' and 'Nation': Definite or Indefinite', in *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. by Stuart Airlie, Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (Wien: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), 179-189; Patrick Wormald, *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Church Society and Its Historian*, ed. by Stephen Baxter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6.

community is imagined because it is made up of people who are aware of the existence of one another, without having ever met each other; the nation is limited because it has set boundaries, 'finite, if elastic'.⁴ These ideas can clearly be applied to England any time from the tenth century onwards. The biggest problem arises with Anderson's definition of a sovereign state:

It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Coming to maturity at a stage of human history when even the most devout adherents of any universal religion were inescapably confronted with the living *pluralism* of such religions, and the allomorphism between each faith's ontological claims and territorial stretch, nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state.⁵

What is unclear here is why a 'sovereign state', a state free from outside interference, necessarily has to be a state without a 'divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynasty'. Nations can dream of being free without the need for what appears to be some form of democracy.

The earlier states, as Anderson describes them, are seen as examples of religious communities, by which he means the Roman Church, early Islam, and Buddhism: communities which governed great swathes of territory, and were 'imaginable largely through the medium of a sacred language and written script'.⁶ These communities included a huge range of smaller states, but Anderson does not seem to take account of the point that, for instance with the Roman Church, while there was a central focus for the religion, this did not stop states within its realm from fighting with one another, disputing boundaries and attempting to increase their own wealth. The Christian community is an ideal which has never stood up well in practice. At the same time, Anderson seems to be ignoring the existence of kingdoms, principalities, city states and other autonomous structures which would have certainly considered themselves to be 'sovereign'.

⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 7.

⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 7.

⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 13.

The central focus of government is another problem which Anderson has with these earlier communities. 'In the older imagining, where the states were defined by centres, borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another.'⁷ While this is true of many early kingdoms in Europe, England does prove to be unique, in that much of its borders have been fixed for a very long time. Partly this is a result of being the largest entity on an island, and partly because the people around the edges, in Wales and to a lesser extent Scotland, remained separate peoples even when conquered by the Normans.

Anderson's imagined community appears to be one generated by a revolutionary rule of the people. He does not accept a kingdom, with a sovereign ruler, as a 'nation', as such.⁸ Nationhood is based, in his eyes, on a people-led governance, and therefore he only sees it where colonised territories throw off the coloniser's rule and make a new community for themselves. This theory is based heavily upon his research in South-East Asia, where in the nineteenth and early twentieth century much of the land was ruled by European nations, and so these nation-building revolutions can, and did have to, happen. However, his work is also applied to the vast empires which grew up in Europe, which encompassed peoples who did not feel that they belonged with other peoples under the same ruler; peoples who felt *conquered*, and as such, second-class citizens in the larger community.⁹

Capital-N-Nationalism, then, in Anderson's view, is the determination to carve out, usually from old empires, a smaller, self-governing, non-monarchist state comprised of people who share the same ethnicity, language or religion. Nationalism is expressed in the gaining of independence from these larger (usually European) states, and the revolutions needed to force this independence. What is still up for dispute is whether these were the earliest 'imagined communities', the first expressions of a national identity able to include a range of people who otherwise are unconnected. It is quite clear from the texts written at the time, such as the Anglo-Saxon chronicles and those of William of Malmesbury and Henry of

⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 19.

⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 80-81.

⁹ Anderson, 'Official Nationalism and Imperialism', in *Imagined Communities*, pp. 83-111.

Huntingdon, that in Anglo-Saxon England and even Anglo-Norman England there was a community which was imagined much larger than that based on face-to-face contact. This community was based instead on an idea of shared territory first – despite whoever may be ruling it at the time – with language and religion playing a significant role in the creation of the community. Rule by the people is not the only form of national identity: people have long been perfectly capable of imagining themselves into complex communities well before the existence of modern democracy.

Krishan Kumar's book, *The Making of English National Identity*, opens with a very careful description of the problem of the terms 'English', 'national' and 'identity'.¹⁰ He points out that 'Nationalism proclaims the unique character and destiny of each and every nation. It is precisely such claims that enable us to treat nations collectively'.¹¹ He allows for what some have called 'national consciousness' in medieval times, while at the same time remarking that '[t]he difficulty with all these examples is knowing what to make of them.' Kumar appears fixed on the idea that 'the 'age of nationalism' [is an] era that began with the French Revolution and reached its peak in the later nineteenth century,' and he suggests that these earlier expressions should be called something else, perhaps 'patriotism', 'tribal consciousness', 'national pride', or 'protonationalism':

all of which suggest a clear distinction, at least conceptually, between these expressions and true nationalism[...] Might they not all be seen as simply as expressions of ethnicity – for not even the most confirmed 'modernist' denies the existence of ethnic groups and ethnic consciousness stretching right back to the beginnings of recorded history? (Modernists simply deny that 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' are the same things, or can be reduced to one another.)¹²

He concludes, at this point, that 'we should accept a degree of plasticity and variability in the concepts of nation, nationhood and even nationalism', that nationalism and national identity are not necessarily coterminous, and that 'it is a mistake to equate all forms of national belonging with the nineteenth century form, the form that is expressed in the ideology of

¹⁰ Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, pp. 1-38.

¹¹ Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, p. 21.

¹² Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, p. 29.

nationalism'.¹³ However, his claims are undermined by the fact that he repeatedly conflates these terms in the rest of his work.

Despite starting out so promisingly, Kumar then spends the rest of his book explaining why English national identity did not exist before the French Revolution and the nineteenth century. He argues that every historian 'finds' the 'original example of national consciousness' in their own period of speciality, 'but clearly the period-bound historians cannot all be right'.¹⁴ This is where his argument fails most noticeably. While the period-bound historians cannot all be right in locating the *original* example of national consciousness in their own period, the fact that they can demonstrate some form of national consciousness points to its existence in the minds of the people writing at the time, that national identity was there long before the French Revolution. Kumar spends the next couple of chapters explaining why any particular period before the nineteenth century cannot be the initial point of national identity, but the argument is always the same: 'because it's not after the French Revolution':

The idea of English nationalism in the eighteenth century is anachronistic. This is not because the idea of the nation did not exist then; it was, as everyone agrees, actively in the process of formation at this time. It is simply that it was an irrelevance to English life and English thought in the current conditions of England's existence. There was no English nationalism [...] because there was no need for it.¹⁵

Like Anderson, Kumar equates nationalism with some form of popular rebellion, some acting-out of an oppressed people. Throughout his work, Kumar interchanges the use of nationalism, national identity, and nationhood, even after having tried to define them as separate ideas, an action which makes his argument lose its force. His argument also breaks down in many places, such as, when discussing fifteenth-century English kings, he states that: 'while they might use national feeling to aid their designs [on Continental land grabs] it would have made no sense to stress an exclusive English nationalism'.¹⁶ However, that there

¹³ Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, pp. 32, 33, 34.

¹⁴ Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, p. 41.

¹⁵ Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, p. 178.

¹⁶ Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, p. 58.

is an English national feeling which the kings can use points to the existence, at that time, of a national identity.

Thus, 'Nationalism' is a term which has gathered so much of the nineteenth-century concept around it that it is hard to consider it separate from the baggage of an 'ism'. It is seen by Kumar, Anderson and others as the movement of a smaller group towards self-determination from a larger body, and thus, it is inextricably linked to 'a desire for political autonomy, the feeling that the "only legitimate type of government is self-government"'.¹⁷ In this study, then, the idea of 'nationalism' is to be separated from that of 'national identity'. 'National identity' is to be read as the concept that people within a state feel that they belong to that nation, that territory, and that there is something there which encompasses all those who share the land, 'an immutable [...] feeling of groupness'.¹⁸ While the term 'nationalism' may have to be used, it will be in reference to the works of other scholars.

Similarly, for the purposes of this thesis, the discussion will be focused on 'English identity', a concept which allows for the rise and fall of the nation, while retaining the idea of a people who belonged to the land which remains throughout the changes in governance. The term 'national identity' will largely be reserved for discussions of other studies. 'English identity', like other national identities, is a concept that is built on an 'us versus them' mentality, where 'us' is much wider than the local or ethnic grouping. Here one can see the initiation of the idea that, while various people of different ethnicities share the land, they belong to the land, and are joined by their allegiance to it and to the ruling group.

Let Them Speak for Themselves

In this present study, which considers the contributions of saints' *vitae* to English identity, my approach is to look at what the writers said in the post-Conquest years, to look at the ideas in context. This is the approach most often taken by medieval historians, with the result that most of them argue for the existence of an English national identity long before the

¹⁷ Edwards, *Language, Society and Identity*, p. 11.

¹⁸ Edwards, *Language, Society and Identity*, p. 15.

nationalist movements of the nineteenth century. Their cause is aided by the earliest English historian, Bede (c. 672-735), and those who came after him, particularly the chroniclers of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries.

The very title of Bede's work, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*,¹⁹ proclaims the existence of an English people, long before the establishment of a unified English state. Kumar argues that Bede's concern in this book was the conversion of the peoples in Britain to Christianity, and therefore they are united in one faith, but this in no way detracts from the core issue of the concept of an English people.²⁰ While Bede is writing a history focused on the church, he does not subsume the English people into the Roman Church and describe all Christians as one people. He is very clear about the number of peoples in Britain (four), and the language of the Church – Latin – is seen as uniting the English, the British, the Scots and the Picts, in a Christian setting but not as one people.²¹ In contrast to Kumar, Adrian Hastings demonstrates the role of religion as key to the development of an English identity, and the subsequent re-emergence of Englishness after the Norman Conquest.²²

While Bede did not live to see England united under one king, that did not prevent him from describing an English people who, while they may have come from different tribes, shared much the same language and culture, and therefore were a separate and unique people, different from the other groups which lived in the island of Britain. The outer boundaries of the different kingdoms were much the same as the boundaries of the later English state, both when it was unified under Æthelstan in 928 and later under the Norman rule. This is not to say that England was fated to be unified, but rather that the Wessex conquest of the lands to the north and east of them was a conquest of other *English* peoples.²³ Once unified, regional loyalties remained, but there was an overarching identity: above Mercians, West Saxons, East Anglians and Northumbrians was the new identifier, which was at the same time not new,

¹⁹ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). (Bede, *HE*).

²⁰ Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, pp. 41-2.

²¹ Bede, *HE*, i:1, pp. 16-19.

²² Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*, pp. 35-65.

²³ Wormald, 'Engla Lond', pp. 3-6.

that of the English.

The next issue which interrupts many historians' views on English national identity is the arrival of the Normans in 1066. To quote Kumar again,

What kind of nation is it in which virtually the whole governing class speaks a language different from the common people, and in which the dominant institutions and outlook are firmly international? Certainly not a modern nation – or better perhaps, not a nation in the modern sense.²⁴

It would mean that we have to accept the coexistence of two nations, one Norman, one English, one upper class, one embodying the common people. States can exist with a plurality of ethnic groups, but the degree of difference entailed in the stark contrast of English and Norman would have made the Anglo-Norman state unworkable.²⁵

In these passages, Kumar oversimplifies the stratifications – economic, linguistic and ideological – of modern nations. Moreover, when looking at what chroniclers shortly after the Conquest are writing, we *can* see expressions of a nation. Eadmer of Canterbury, in describing Lanfranc's doubts about English saints, explains that it was because the archbishop, 'as an Englishman, was still somewhat green'.²⁶ As Jay Rubenstein states, '[w]e may infer from this grammatical construction that Lanfranc did eventually become a true *Anglus*.'²⁷ Normans and other foreigners, by living in England, became Englishmen (and women), just as William of Normandy became King of the English.

The oath of allegiance to the king which was sworn by freemen at the age of twelve would have served to further reinforce this unity.²⁸ Here again is a point at which the modernist, nationalist historians baulk: that the centre of the state, the point on which the loyalty rests, is

²⁴ Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, p. 53.

²⁵ Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, p. 49.

²⁶ Eadmer of Canterbury, *The Life of St Anselm*, ed. and trans. by R. W. Southern (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962), p. 50.

²⁷ Jay Rubenstein, 'Liturgy against History: The Competing Visions of Lanfranc and Eadmer of Canterbury', *Speculum*, 74/2 (1999), 279-309 (p. 285).

²⁸ This possibly originated in King Edgar's day (959-75), and was renewed under William the Conqueror. Malmesbury, *GRA*, II: 148, pp. 238-241, III: 258, pp. 476-479.

the king.²⁹ However, it would appear that the overriding loyalty is to the state, despite the fact that English rulers, from Cnut through William the Conqueror and down to Richard I, spent the majority of their time outside the kingdom. It was not their presence in the nation that made them the kings of England, but their relationship to it. While the rulers of England owned land on the Continent, they were never 'king' of Normandy or Anjou. As Kumar rightly points out, after the Norman Conquest, 'there are frequent references throughout the works of the historians that suggest that they see the English *natio* as an amalgam of English and Norman *gentes*'.³⁰

The writers of English history in the twelfth century had no problem in talking about the English nation, or the English kings, when many of the kings were not English by birth. While following the description Bede gives of England at the start of his work, William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* deals fairly, according to himself, with the arrival of the Normans.³¹ Indeed, the openings of many of the subsequent histories imitate Bede in describing the land, its geographical borders and other features, and praising how rich and fertile it is. Thus, it would appear that the identity of the English is bound up with the land in some way, which would then allow those coming in (the Normans, for example) to become English by virtue of their relationship with the same land.

The re-emergence of English as an official language in written texts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries points to a further development of English identity. As has been remarked by Edwards, Anderson and Kumar, the revival of a native language, and especially the development of a printing culture in that language, is a key factor in the development of national identity.³² While this is true of nineteenth and twentieth century nationalisms, it also operated in England in the earlier period. The arrival of printing presses in England in 1485 served to spread a newly emerging literature. Along with the appearance of texts in

²⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 81-2.

³⁰ Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, p. 51.

³¹ Malmesbury, *GRA*, III: Preface, pp. 424-5.

³² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 67-82; Edwards, *Language, Society and Identity*, pp. 23-46; Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, pp. 53-9.

English, there was a blossoming of texts about England, histories (William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, Orderic Vitalis and many others), myths (Malory, and Gaimar) and saints' legends (in collections such as the *South English Legendary*).

English national identity may have been a construct, loosely based on Pope Gregory the Great's sixth-century reference to the blond '*Angli*' slaves whom he saw in the market. This construct was, however, subsequently used by Bede and other historians.³³ It was an idea which was accepted almost across the board by the people who wrote things down, and therefore was a construct which was disseminated in historical accounts, in the writing which was spread then, and survives until today. At the grass-roots level, the illiterate Englishman or woman probably associated him or herself with a regional identity, and a small region at that – parish, village, manor, or perhaps a town. Still, the layers of clergymen, of lawgivers, of larger landowner, of readers, the layers which still had regular contact with the grass-roots, were exposed to the idea of a larger group, a cohesive unit based largely on territory, the concept of the *gens Anglorum*. Given the references to the English people, land, language and nation found in the texts covered in this study, there is no hesitation here in referring to an English identity.

Saints' Vitae and English Identity

Saints' *vitae* in the medieval period had a multiplicity of uses.³⁴ They were employed by preachers as exemplars of moral and religious living; they were read as remembrances on feast days; they were written into collections for communities and individuals. The range of genres in which they appear (heroic, religious, romantic), suggests a range of audiences, some of whom are directly addressed in the work, others of whom are assumed or imagined from the provenance of the manuscript. Saints' *vitae* included biblical, apocryphal, martyred, or just holy men, women, and children. They were produced by and for communities and individuals with differing aims, both conscious and unconscious, as Felice Lifshitz points out:

³³ Bede, *HE*, ii:1, pp. 132-135; compare with Malmesbury, *GRA*, I: 45, pp. 60-2.

³⁴ Much of this is informed by Sarah Salih, 'Introduction: Saints, Cults and Lives in Late Medieval England', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. by Sarah Salih (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 1-23.

Biographies of saints provided communities and institutions with written traditions; they defended the independence of communities and institutions against those who wished to subject them; they defended property rights and territorial endowments; they fuelled episcopal rivalries; they conveyed political and theological stances; they propagated an individual author's or group's notion of 'the holy'; they served, in short, manifold purposes.³⁵

The role of Anglo-Saxon saints' *vitae* in the formation and development of the English identities is a developing field of enquiry. However, the *vitae* are chiefly discussed with reference to Anglo-Saxon male saints (kings and bishops), and most commonly focused on those lives found in legends.³⁶ These two points are interwoven: Anglo-Saxon saints whose *vitae* are found in the majority of printed legends (either those first printed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, or older Middle English and Latin collections published more recently) are male. Versions of the thirteenth-century *South English Legendary* originally contained up to five Anglo-Saxon or British women: Eadburh, Mildrith, Æthelthryth, Frideswide and Winifred. The *Gilte Legende*, an updated prose version of the *Legendary*, only includes Frideswide, and Caxton's printed version, from the fifteenth century, omits even her.³⁷ Thus, the edition of the *South English Legendary* which was produced by Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill was based on a manuscript which omits all the Anglo-Saxon women.³⁸

Thorlac Turville-Petre, in *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-*

³⁵ Felice Lifshitz, 'Beyond Positivism and Genre: "Hagiographical" Texts as Historical Narrative', *Viator*, 25 (1994) 95-113 (p. 97, n. 7).

³⁶ See Katherine J. Lewis, 'Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives, History and National Identity in Late Medieval England', in *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, ed. by Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 160-170; Katherine J. Lewis, 'History, Hagiography and Re-Writing the Past', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, pp. 122-140; Sarah Foot, 'Remember, Forgetting and Inventing' pp. 185-200 (where she discusses the absence of women in sources from the Viking Age); Jill Frederick, 'The South English Legendary: Anglo-Saxon Saints and National Identity', in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Donald Scragg & Carole Weinburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 57-73; and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' Lives and the Female Reader', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 27 (1991), 314-332.

³⁷ Lewis, 'Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives', pp. 162, 169. Lewis' article is very interesting, but is based on De Worde's printed edition of the *Gilte Legende*. As this editions did not contain any Anglo-Saxon female saints' Lives, and neither does the EETS edition, the *Gilte Legende* is not considered in this thesis.

³⁸ *The South English Legendary*, ed. by Charlotte d'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, E.E.T.S., o.s., 235, 236, 244 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956, 1959).

1340, deals with the formation of English national identity within a very short period leading up to the Hundred Years' War. His work is partly in response to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, and looks at the role played by the writers of English histories in the development of the English language. His study of the *South English Legendary* is based on D'Evelyn and Mill's edition, and so the English saints whom he discusses are the kings and bishops: Osmund, Edmund, Wulfstan, Edward, and Thomas. He also sees the *South English Legendary* as a demonstration of the interaction between English saints and the wider Christian community: 'Here the nation of England takes its central place within a universal Christian family guarded by a community of saints.'³⁹ He is concerned, however, to demonstrate how medieval nationalism shares many characteristics with modern nationalism, rather than looking for a medieval approach to nationalism.⁴⁰

Jocelyn Wogan-Browne discusses ideas of nation and women's identity, but much of her work focuses on the early Middle English *Ancrene Wisse* and the saints' *vitae* which accompany it in most manuscripts, those of Juliana, Katherine and Margaret.⁴¹ However, her study of the Campsey manuscript (British Library, MS Additional 70513, a collection of Anglo-Norman *vitae*, including the three known to be written by women) is of some relevance to this study.⁴² In commenting on the composition of a manuscript for reading at meals in a post-Conquest female house, Wogan-Browne notes the inclusion of seven Anglo-Saxon saints in the original ten *vitae*. These local saints – Æthelthryth, Edmund of Canterbury, Edward the Confessor, Modwenna, Osyth, Richard of Chichester and Thomas à Becket – along with Mary Magdalene, Faith of Agen and Catherine of Alexandria, provide, for women, a range of examples on dealing with daily life and the pressures of choosing a religious vocation, but they are also noticeably *local*: the places described in the texts range

³⁹ Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 61.

⁴⁰ See David Wallace, *Premodern Places: Calais to Surinam, Chaucer to Aphra Behn* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 18, n. 23.

⁴¹ See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Lesley Johnson, 'National, World and Women's History', Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' Lives and the Female Reader'.

⁴² Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Powers of Record, Powers of Example: Hagiography and Women's History', in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 71-93.

around the East Anglian countryside.⁴³ This manuscript can provide a sense of the identity of the community for whom it was compiled, but Wogan-Browne argues that it

cannot be worked on in the grand nationalizing way in which [*Ancrene Wisse*] began its successful career. [...] The Campsey collection doesn't enter the nationalizing narrative of English scholarship at any stage of postmedieval antiquarian or scholarly inquiry.⁴⁴

Katherine J. Lewis examines fifteenth-century developments of the formation of English national identity and culture.⁴⁵ She sees a nationhood developing from the opposition of and to Others: the French in the Hundred Years War, the Italians and Flemings in trade, the increasing tension with the Roman Church. Thus, she argues that the majority of texts written in the fifteenth century were historiographical, deliberately developing a consciousness of an English past, and that saints' *vitae* are a subset of such histories.⁴⁶ However, as with Turville-Petre, she focuses on collections and legendaries, which omit the Anglo-Saxon female saints.

The ideas of Englishness and the contributions of the Anglo-Saxon female saints to the continuing development of those ideas which are presented here are thus building on studies which have gone before. However, this present focus on the female saints is new, and contributes to a deeper understanding of the early stages in the expression of Englishness. Not all of the English saints who were venerated after the Norman Conquest were kings or bishops. Saintry women, too, had a role in presenting the Anglo-Saxons as a valuable concept, worth aligning to culturally, and thus adding to the attraction of Englishness.

As the focus here is on post-Conquest representations of Anglo-Saxon saints in the development of national identity and ideas of Englishness, the impact of the Norman Conquest is of great significance. While all the texts covered in this study are post-Conquest, some are more 'post' than others, and therefore the texts are divided chronologically. The

⁴³ Wogan-Browne, 'Powers of Record', pp. 78, 82-84.

⁴⁴ Wogan-Browne, 'Powers of Record', pp. 90, 91.

⁴⁵ Lewis, 'Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives'.

⁴⁶ Lewis, 'Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives', pp. 160-1.

fourth chapter will cover texts composed or finished in the late eleventh and the twelfth centuries, those written within a few generations of the Conquest. These texts are the same ones found in the first half of the thesis as 'commissioned texts'. One of the noticeable effects of the Conquest on religious houses was the need to reassert the power and efficacy of their saint to the new religious elite, and to present it in 'good Latin', that is, in a more acceptable literary style. Thus Goscelin, writing at the request of communities, was conscious of the Continental bishops who would also be reading his works, and so the hagiographer goes to some lengths to demonstrate the miracles of Edith, Æthelburh and Wulfild. While the surviving manuscript of Osbert's *Vita Edburge* is not dedicated to a bishop, it does seem to have been written in part for the monks of Pershore, and therefore likely to come to the notice of bishops. He is concerned to give Eadburh a Latin polish and to present an up-to-date version of her life. The communities, too, would have received members from among the immigrants to England, and so their ethnic composition would have changed. Therefore, the new *vitae* of the Anglo-Saxon saints would have had a formative influence on their views of the value of Englishness.

The fifth chapter will then look at the texts written at a greater distance from the Conquest, mostly from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. By this stage, the Anglo-Saxon female saints are being very clearly identified as English saints. The texts which these saints are found in are more commonly collections, and this collecting and rewriting of the English saints represents a response to different issues – the Conquest had become part of a more distant past, and issues of ethnicity were focused on new Others, particularly the French, against which there was a need to assert the identity both of the English and of the saints. Some of these collections, particularly those including female saints, can be traced to female communities. That women religious were reading, and perhaps requesting, such collections reveals the involvement of women in the generation and dissemination of texts which served to inform a sense of English identity. This audience has been previously overlooked, and thus this thesis serves to broaden the scope of future studies of English identity.

Chapter IV

Ideas of 'English' After the Conquest

When, by the providence of God, Alfred, son of King Æthelwulf, his worshipper, ruled over the English people, the teachings of religion through him were disseminated in the minds of the faithful and became strong, and the doctrine of truth shone all around, poured forth like the light of a new sun.
(Osbert of Clare, *Vita Edburge*.¹)

Nostalgia – looking back to a Golden Age in the past – is a key topic around which the ideas of a national or ethnic identity accrete. As Osbert's *Vita Edburge* shows, this concept was utilised by the hagiographers, whether intentionally or not, and served to create a sense of the value of Englishness in the past, which then linked to the attractiveness of contemporary ideas of Englishness.

Religious writing, that is, writing both by and about religious people and communities, has been recognised as playing an important part in the development of an English identity. However, discussions of the hagiography of Anglo-Saxon or English saints (using 'English' for a saint from England after the Conquest, including those such as Thomas à Becket, who was Norman) still largely focus on male saints.² As I argue, hagiographers of female saints also played an important part in the negotiation between Norman and Anglo-Saxon parties, usually Norman bishops and Anglo-Saxon religious foundations, and their Anglo-Saxon saints. This chapter will argue that these hagiographies of female saints also played a significant role in the dissemination of an English identity. While dedicated to bishops, usually Norman or at least Continental, their intended audience was largely the inhabitants of the religious houses which commissioned the work and possibly the visitors and pilgrims who might hear the *vita* read on important feast days. While this audience was still an elite one, given the composition of the nunneries, the presence of an Anglo-Saxon saint in the

¹ "*Imperante populo Anglorum Dei providentia cultore eius Aluredo Aðulfi regis filio, religionis per hunc disciplina in mentibus fidelium disseminata conualuit, et tanquam noui solis claritas doctrina ueritatis infusa reluxit*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 263.

² See, for example, Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*, pp. 1-65, 185-209, and Hugh M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation and Identity 1066-c.1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 283-296.

community is likely to have led to the propagation of stories about her, based on the written works produced for the religious house.³ These hagiographies construct a positive image of England and the English ways similar to those found in the chronicles.

Language was an issue in the dissemination of both saints' *vitae* and ideas of Englishness. Texts written shortly after the Conquest were recorded in Latin. In many cases the saint's *vita* was being translated – as well as rewritten – into a language which could be understood by the new guardians of the saint in question. A few Anglo-Norman hagiographies were written by women, including a late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century verse *vita* of Æthelthryth, *La Vie Seinte Audrée*. The author of this text identifies herself simply as 'Marie', while a late twelfth-century *vie* of Edward the Confessor was written by an anonymous nun of Barking, whom some scholars believe to have been Clemence, author of the Anglo-Norman *vie* of St Catherine.⁴ In the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts, there are corresponding changes in the literary language, and the texts are written in English either for a lay audience or for a female community whose Latin learning had lapsed.

While 'English identity' may have been largely the product and performance of the elite, restricted to clergy and religious groups and those who could read or afford to be read to, women were a part of this construction of identity: as patrons, such as Queen Matilda for whom William of Malmesbury wrote; as commissioners, such as the nuns requesting new versions of their saints' Lives; as subjects of the reconstructions such as the rewritten saints, saints who were depicted as interacting with both the Normans and the English; and as audience, such as the nuns reading and listening to the new *vitae*, or queens and their waiting-women, who probably read or listened to chronicles and histories, or those of the lower ranks, who may have heard about the saint and travelled to her shrine to seek assistance.

³ Thomas, *English and Normans*, pp. 289-290.

⁴ M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman in the Cloisters: The Influence of the Orders upon Anglo-Norman Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1950), p. 75.

English Identity

The inhabitants of the land currently called England have identified themselves as English from at least around the time of King Alfred. Patrick Wormald (among others) traces the source of this back to Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*:

What we have to explain is not only the sense of community which Anglo-Saxons acquired against the political odds, but also the fact that they all came to be called English. Alfred knew that he was a Saxon: when he took control of south-west Mercia in the 880s, his new title was 'rex Anglorum [et] Saxonum' or 'rex Anglsaxonum'. But he also wrote of 'Angelcynn' and 'Englisc'. His nostalgia for the learning and glory that 'England' had lost was undoubtedly inspired by Bede. [...] His was an 'Ecclesiastical History of our island and people', but the 'gens Anglorum' is well to the fore. Except when founding one of the most flourishing of archaeological industries by describing the continental origins of Britain's invaders, Bede only used 'Saxon' when it was in his foreign source, when it was accurate (as for the East, West or South Saxons) or when referring to the vernacular. These English were as much a singular 'gens' or 'natio' as the 'populi' and 'regna' that went to make them up, and they have their singular Church: Theodore was the first archbishop obeyed by 'omnis Anglorum ecclesia'. The island's Celtic inhabitants give the story its context and play their part in it. But the main theme is the growth and expansion of the Christian Faith of the English people, from Gregory the pope to Egbert the pilgrim; it is the story of their Covenant.⁵

Wormald argues that this is due to the way in which Pope Gregory sent out the missions to the barbarian inhabitants of the island of Britain. Being informed that they were Angles, Gregory set out to establish a church for the '*gens Anglorum*'.⁶ In his essay, 'The Venerable Bede and the 'Church of the English'', Wormald states,

The Church brought more than a new communal *persona*. It gave it a name. English identity was not, like Frankish or (Continental) Saxon, a badge of the most successful of the peoples contesting supremacy in a given sphere. It was what each Anglo-Saxon was called in Heaven. The idea of '*Anglecynn*' was conceived not, like that of 'the Men of Ireland', in the mists of legendary antiquity, but in the mind of God. Yet not even Canterbury possessed the ideological clout to impose a new ethnicity unaided. It was Bede who gave 'Englishness' a manifesto of unique grace and power.⁷

⁵ Patrick Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*', in *The Times of Bede*, pp. 106-134 (p. 118).

⁶ Wormald, '*Bretwaldas*', p. 120.

⁷ Wormald, 'The Venerable Bede and the "Church of the English"', in *The Times of Bede*, pp. 207-228 (p. 213).

Ideas of 'English' after the Conquest

It was this power of 'Englishness' that Hugh M. Thomas maintains was one of the key factors behind the re-emergence of an English identity as the defining concept of the inhabitants of England after the Conquest.

The idea of an English identity, then, was well-established in the written histories of England before 1066. Bede had picked up Pope Gregory's vocabulary and used it to describe the development of the 'English' church, which spread to include all the Germanic tribes on the island of Britain. While Bede did not live to see a 'united' people of England, his work was widely read in later periods. His concentration on the unity of the church paved the way for a later Englishman, Alfred, to create a new myth of an English people. According to Sarah Foot,

[t]hrough his promotion of the term *Angelcynn* to reflect the common identity of his people in a variety of texts dating from the latter part of his reign, and his efforts in cultivating the shared memory of his West Mercian and West Saxon subjects, King Alfred might be credited with the invention of the English as a political community.⁸

Using Bede as a point of origin, Foot demonstrates how Alfred deliberately rewrote the history of the 'barbarian invaders', the Anglo-Saxons (a term which can be used at this point in discussing the inhabitants of England, as Alfred is labelled *rex Angul-Saxonum*) into a unified whole.⁹ While Alfred's rewriting, along with the translating of various Northumbrian and Mercian saints into 'areas of West Saxon hegemony', can be seen as an act of colonisation, his use of '*Englisc*' to describe the language and his deliberate adoption, as a Saxon, of the label '*Angle*' points to a considered tactic based, once again, on Gregory the Great's designation of the English Church.¹⁰

Alfred's idea of the English was maintained up until the Conquest. Even the Danish king, Cnut, used English laws and treated the English people as separate from his own Danish

⁸ Sarah Foot, 'The Making of Angelcynn: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 6 (1996), 25-49 (p. 25).

⁹ Foot, 'Making of Angelcynn', p. 27-28.

¹⁰ Foot, 'Remember, Forgetting and Inventing', p. 192; Foot, 'Making of Angelcynn', p. 41.

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people.¹¹ But Cnut and his sons' rule over England was fleeting. What is more surprising is that English identity survived the Norman Conquest and the replacement of the English nobility with Norman invaders, eventually encompassing the Normans themselves, who often described themselves as English, and this despite the fact that some English people today still claim descent from the Normans.¹² Thomas provides an in-depth study of the various processes involved with assimilation and points out that the survival of 'English' as the identity for the inhabitants of England is a complex issue. In studying a range of the issues which have been assumed to be the reason that the inhabitants of England remained English, Thomas concludes that, while

[t]he construction of identity did get bound up in politics in medieval England, [...] there is no evidence of any effort by kings or political elites to impose English identity. Instead it moved upwards, and the kings were the last to become thoroughly English after 1066.¹³

This upward momentum goes against commonly accepted theories of identity, and is different from the Englishness created by Alfred. However, Thomas provides a plausible reason for how English went against the trend, and once again the focus returns to the English Church:

If any group can be described as the *Traditionskern* ['nucleus of tradition'] of English identity in the post-conquest period, it was the English clergy. They were not the only preservers of English identity, but a variety of factors limited the impact of other groups in the survival and revival of Englishness. In contrast, the religious can be shown to be deeply involved in the maintenance of English identity. [...] [A] number of clerical and monastic writers seized control of the ethnic discourse by preserving English traditions and defending English honour. Many of these writers were demonstrably of at least partial English ancestry, and the survival of many natives in the church gave them a favourable environment in which to work. Naturally, the religious monopoly on the written word may exaggerate the role of the clergy in the triumph of Englishness. [...] I would argue that the English religious, working as prestigious insiders within the church, were [...] crucial to the survival and spread of

¹¹ Wormald, 'Bretwaldas', p. 108.

¹² Thomas, *English and Normans*, pp. 14, 134.

¹³ Thomas, *English and Normans*, p. 11. Thomas identifies the some of the key issues as being: intermarriage among the aristocracy (discussed in chapters 9 & 10); the majority of the population being English (chapters 11 & 12); and the townspeople, who interacted most closely with the Normans in trade, being English (chapter 12).

English identity.¹⁴

These clerical writers include chroniclers such as William of Malmesbury (c.1090-1143), who had 'the blood of both nations in [his] veins'; Henry of Huntingdon (c.1088-1156), also of mixed parentage; Geoffrey of Monmouth (d. 1155); and hagiographers such as the Flemish Goscelin of Saint-Bertin (c. 1040-1114) and the English Osbert of Clare (d.1158).¹⁵ Of these, only Goscelin of Saint-Bertin was a true immigrant. While the others may have been influenced by their upbringing, and those of mixed parentage may have been influenced particularly by the use of the English language at home in the development of their own identities, they were still writing within and for a mostly Norman elite. Chroniclers and hagiographers had different foci in their works, but both groups were presenting and reiterating an idea of England.

Chroniclers

One of the as-yet-unexplained points of interest about the post-Conquest chronicles and their writers is the focus on the history of England, both before and after the arrival of the Normans. Many of these men (and they were all men) were half-English, half-Norman, and yet they wrote about the 'History of the Kings of England' or the 'History of the English People'. While one can argue that the geographical territory inhabited is a key factor in the creation of a national identity, as Catherine Clarke does,¹⁶ this does not explain why 'England' became the key term, rather than 'Britain', when almost every chronicle imitates Bede (who imitated Gildas) in describing the whole island. Thomas asserts the value of the idea of Britain:

as an island, Britain could seem a less artificial construct than England. [...] In the middle of the twelfth century, moreover, the concept of Britain received a tremendous shot in the arm from Geoffrey of Monmouth's wonderful, inventive, and extremely popular history.¹⁷

¹⁴ Thomas, *English and Normans*, pp. 200-1

¹⁵ Malmesbury, *GRA*, III: Preface, pp. 424-425; Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. xxvi-xxvii; Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women*, p. 1-2.

¹⁶ Catherine A. M. Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England, 700-1400* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), p. 7.

¹⁷ Thomas, *English and Normans*, p. 264.

And yet it was 'England' that was used in titles, both of kings and histories. Somehow, the concept of the island of Britain 'had very little effect on ethnic identity in the period under discussion'.¹⁸ Thomas suggests that this is because 'England, the place, could stand in for its inhabitants' even while they still self-identified as being 'Norman' or 'Flemish', and were as yet unready for a collective identity as a people.¹⁹ 'Britain', on the other hand, did not become so uniquely associated with the inhabitants of the land, despite the popularity of Geoffrey of Monmouth's book. This is possibly because 'Britain', as the island, included Scotland and Wales, two territories which remained Other, and which were occupied by two fiercely independent ethnic groups.

The chroniclers, collectively, reiterated the construct that was England, and in the process, the English people. According to R. R. Davies,

[w]hat needs to be emphasised here is that these historians were quite clear what they were about; they were constructing an image, a historical mythology, of the past of the English people. It was not accidental that they gave their books titles such as *Historia Anglorum* or *Estoire des Engleis*. William of Malmesbury declared his intention to write 'a continuous history of the English' and to record 'the deeds of the English from their arrival in England'; Henry of Huntingdon likewise proclaimed his wish to chronicle 'the deeds of this kingdom and the origins of our people' (*nostrae gentis*) and punctuated his work with periodic announcements of further stages in the evolution of the English nation[.]²⁰

William of Malmesbury's preface clearly indicates what he wanted his project to accomplish, which was the continuation of the history of the English found in Bede, a history not only of people, but also of kings, bishops and thus churches.

The history of the English [*Anglorum*], from their arrival in Britain to his own time, has been told with straightforward charm by Bede, most learned and least proud of men. After Bede you will not easily, I think, find any one who has devoted himself to

¹⁸ Thomas, *English and Normans*, p. 264.

¹⁹ Thomas, *English and Normans*, p. 268.

²⁰ R. R. Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100-1400: IV, Language and Historical Mythology', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Sixth Series*, 7 (1997), 1-24 (p. 19).

writing English history in Latin.²¹

While there had been others who recorded chronicles, Malmesbury saw a gap in learning, in history, and strove to fill it:

[T]hus [Eadmer] omits two hundred and twenty-three years after Bede which he thought unworthy of remark, and in that interval history limps along with no support from literature. It was therefore my design, in part moved by love of my country [*patriae caritatem*] and in part encouraged by influential friends [Queen Matilda and the brothers of our church], to mend the broken chain of our history, and give a Roman polish to the rough annals of our native speech.²²

Two important points are brought to light in this preface. First, this history was to be done in Latin. He had found some 'some records in the form of annals in the [native – *patrio*] tongue, arranged in order of date', and saw a need to preserve them in a language accessible to educated people down through the ages.²³ Malmesbury was also determined to improve on Æthelweard in the matter of Latin writing, and Eadmer in the completeness of his work. Secondly, he claims to be undertaking this out of love for his country, and working from 'our native speech'. While at other times claiming the dual identity of English and Norman, here Malmesbury is clearly stating his primary identity as an Englishman, an inhabitant of England.

Similarly, Huntingdon wrote a 'History of the English People' believing 'that the splendour of historical writing is to be cherished with the greatest delight and given the pre-eminent and most glorious position.'²⁴ He opens with references to Homeric literature and Biblical history, declaring that

the recorded deeds of all peoples and nations [*omnium gentium et nationum*] [...] not only provoke men of the spirit to what is good and deter them from evil, but even

²¹ Malmesbury, *GRA*, I: Prologue, p. 14-15.

²² Malmesbury, *GRA*, I: Prologue, p. 14-15, including addition from one of the manuscripts. (The last clause may be better translated as 'season with Roman wit the barbaric tongue.' Mynors et. al. are writing their own national pride into this work.)

²³ Malmesbury, *GRA*, I: Prologue, p. 14-15.

²⁴ Huntingdon, *HA*, Prologue, p. 2-3.

encourage worldly men to good deeds and reduce their wickedness.²⁵

History was to Huntingdon, as Greenway comments, a literary genre, with the aim not only to instruct people in the events of the past but also to provide examples and cautionary tales for those in power at the time.²⁶ However, while dedicated to Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, Greenway points out that the chronicle was 'written for 'the many – I mean the less educated' (V, preface). It was therefore written in simple language, with a strong story line and plenty of dramatic incidents'.²⁷

Huntingdon states that his aim is to 'narrate the history of this kingdom and the origins of our people', aligning himself, as Malmesbury did, with both the land and the people of England. He, too, constructs a discourse of identity, based on Bede, but also 'borrowing from chronicles preserved in ancient libraries', in the hope that 'the path of history [will] lead us straight back to moral purity.'²⁸

Geoffrey of Monmouth, like Malmesbury and Huntingdon, also claims to be translating 'a certain most ancient book in the British language [...] into the Latin tongue.'²⁹ While his work is more far-fetched than the others, he saw it as complementary to them. Monmouth ends his *History* by referring his readers to Karadoc of Lancarvan for further information on Welsh kings, and Malmesbury and Huntingdon for Saxon kings, along with the comment that

I bid [them] be silent as to the Kings of the Britons, seeing that they have not that book in the British speech which Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, did convey hither out of Brittany, the which [...] I have [...] been at the pains of translating into the Latin speech.³⁰

They, in turn, saw Monmouth's narrative as a fitting part of the history of Britain, with

²⁵ Huntingdon, *HA*, Prologue, p.4-5.

²⁶ Huntingdon, *HA*, p. lviii-lix.

²⁷ Huntingdon, *HA*, p. lviii.

²⁸ Huntingdon, *HA*, pp. 4-7.

²⁹ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Histories of the Kings of Britain*, ed. by Sebastian Evens, (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1963), p. 4.

³⁰ Monmouth, *Histories*, p. 325-26.

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Huntingdon adding an appendix referring to it.³¹ Of course, this further complicates the issue of the development of a national, English, identity by introducing the concept of 'British', a pre-Anglo-Saxon label, which is given added strength in that it identifies those who live on the whole island, Britain, rather than a poorly defined part of it, England.³²

Part of the reason Monmouth's *History* was so appealing was that it fitted in to the cyclic idea of history. The Britons had been a great people once, but then they grew decadent and failed to convert their new neighbours, the Saxons. So more invaders came, and took over the land, and Pope Gregory the Great sent a mission to them, and thus the great Church of the English was born. However, the English in their turn grew lazy, and failed to heed warnings, so the Danes were sent to punish them and remind them of the importance of trusting in God. A period of peace followed, and then the cycle started all over again. Eventually, the Normans were sent by God to bring the English back to true faith. This cycle of invaders sent by God to lead a sinful people back to him was clearly modelled off the history of the people of Israel and their repeated sinning and repentance, as described throughout the Old Testament. Gildas had stated that the reason the Britons were conquered was due to their falling from grace. Bede reiterated that view, and later chroniclers, many of them monks who knew the history of Israel very well, saw further proof in more recent history. The association of a medieval nation with the concept of the Israelites presented in the Bible is not exclusive to England, as Adrian Hasting points out. The very presence of such a strongly modelled idea, a nation under the guidance and protection of God, in a key text which shaped the culture, is a valuable tool in the production of an imagined community.³³

William of Malmesbury plainly foregrounds the Anglo-Saxons' fall from grace in his description of the Battle of Hastings:

So the leaders on both sides, in high spirits, drew up their lines of battle, each in the

³¹ Huntingdon, *HA*, p. ci.

³² See N. J. Higden, *King Arthur: Myth-making and History* (London: Routledge, 2002), who traces the term back to classical Greek descriptions of the land and people, pp. 40-1.

³³ Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*, pp. 17-20, 38.

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traditional [*patrio*] manner. The English – so I have heard – spent a sleepless night in song and wassail, without sleep, and in the morning moved without delay against the enemy.

[...] The Normans on the other hand spent the whole night confessing their sins, and in the morning made their communion.³⁴

Malmesbury explains that, despite brave fighting on the part of the English, the Normans were victorious. He goes on to dissect the character of both sides, with a description of their dress, attitudes to food and warfare and a brief summary of the English history, from when they were barbarians through to their decline in learning, and thus their decline in knowledge of God.³⁵ The choice of the Pope to support Duke William was a further sign that the Normans were favoured by God in this battle.³⁶

Huntingdon also draws very harsh contrasts between the English and the Norman peoples:

In the year of grace 1066, the Lord, the ruler, brought to fulfilment what He had long planned for the English nation [*gente Anglorum* – people of the English]. For He delivered them up for destruction to the violent and cunning Norman people.³⁷

However, Huntingdon points out that William, duke of Normandy, had reasons to believe that he should have the crown of England, according to 'the law of kinship'.³⁸

This image of cyclic history underwrites the discourse of a people who were great in the past, who have now fallen and need revival, but who, in the end, will be restored, as the Kingdom of Israel was restored again and again. The Normans were acting as agents of God, but the emphasis of these chronicles is the role of Christianity in England, the development of the English Church, which leads back to the idea of English. The chroniclers, in writing about England, tied the past and the present together through the ongoing presence of the Church, which brought together both the Normans and the Anglo-Saxons under one banner, that of

³⁴ Malmesbury, *GRA*, III: 241, pp. 452-55.

³⁵ Malmesbury, *GRA*, III: 242-6, pp. 456-61. The Normans, on the other hand, were, "as they still are, well-dressed to a fault, and particular about their food", a sharp contrast to the barbaric English (p. 461).

³⁶ Malmesbury, *GRA*, III: 238, pp. 448-49.

³⁷ Huntingdon, *HA*, VI: 27, pp. 384-85

³⁸ Huntingdon, *HA*, pp. 384-87.

the English.

Hagiographers

Hagiographers were similarly operating to preserve the past, and improve the present.

Narrating the lives of saints from the English past necessarily involved the hagiographers in very similar concerns to those displayed by the chroniclers. These concerns include the idea of England and the English, a concept of a Golden Age in the past, issues of kings and kingship, and the problems of repeated invasions. Hagiographers also had a similar need to represent the past, the saint, and England as attractive to the reader, usually with an eye to a Norman audience. However, the two hagiographers this chapter focuses on are not, like the chroniclers discussed above, half-Norman and half-English. Goscelin of Saint-Bertin (c.1040-1114) was Flemish, and Osbert, of whose parents we know nothing, very proudly self-identified as English.

Having arrived in England before 1065, Goscelin rapidly made himself useful in writing up *vitae* for many communities, recording their saints for the first time, translating works out of Old English, or editing previous *vitae* into more ornate Latin.³⁹ Goscelin is believed to have written *vitae* for Alkmund, Adrian, Augustine, Deusdedit, Eorcongota, Edith, Edward the Confessor, Edward Martyr, Eormenhild, Ethelbert, Æthelburh, Æthelthryth, Ætheldred, Hildelith, Honorius, Yvo, Justus, Kenelm, Laurentius, Letardus, Melitius, Milburh, Mildrith, Osyth, Seaxburh, Swithun, Theodore, Werburh, Wihtburh, Wulfhild, and Wulfsig, all saints who were remembered especially in England, either as missionaries to that place or as royal saints.⁴⁰

Osbert wrote *vitae* of St Edward the Confessor, St Ethelbert and St Edmund, along with St Eadburh. As with Goscelin, no *vitae* of universal saints have been attributed to him.⁴¹ Thus, these two men, one native and one an immigrant, are working to preserve the memory of Anglo-Saxon saints in a universally understood language. They presented these saints to the

³⁹ Hollis, 'Goscelin's Writing', pp. 218-20.

⁴⁰ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 384.

⁴¹ *Letters of Osbert*, pp. 179, 182.

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Norman churchmen not only as the local saints, important forces who needed to be treated with caution and respect, but also as an indication that England, despite its recent downfall, was still home to a holy people who had been considered worthy by God, as illustrated by their miracles.

Female Saints' Vitae

In describing the life and miracles of a saint, especially a royal saint, hagiographers are obliged to deal with the worldly affairs of kings and princes, kingdoms and invaders. For the post-Conquest writers of royal Anglo-Saxon female saints, this obligation was more immediate. Royal saints were inextricably tied to their relatives, and the saints' nunneries were dependant on the patronage of rulers. They needed grants of lands to feed their communities, and the homage paid to the saint herself (and thus the nunneries' income from gifts) was influenced by royal favour. Any change in kingship, therefore, was of immediate interest to the nuns.

Further, the depictions of rulers can be useful in examining the identity of a people. The Anglo-Saxon royal saints were demonstrated to be closely connected to succeeding royal houses, even when there was a total change, not only of dynasty but of ethnicity. By referring to Alfred as king of the English, both Goscelin and Osbert created a sense of a unified past, of a people of the 'English' which had existed back in the ninth century and which continued on into their own time. Alfred's role in strengthening Wessex and conquering the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, thus actually creating a united England, is ignored in their narratives. Instead, the concept of 'England', a land belonging to the English as a single people, is presented by the hagiographers as an unarguable fact.

Unlike in the works of the chroniclers discussed earlier, the Norman Conquest and issues of national significance were not of prime importance to the hagiographers. They did not need to narrate the history of the saint in a chronological order, or directly deal with the great events occurring outside the walls of the nunnery. However, they did need to show the continuing relevance of the saint up to the time of their writing and beyond, and so they

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were caught in a delicate situation. As they were writing not only for the nunneries most nearly concerned with particular saints, but also for the new Norman-introduced prelates, who were instrumental in deciding the roles which the saints would play in the new order, the hagiographers needed to find a way of dealing with issues of the Conquest and interactions with foreigners which balanced the needs of both audiences.

Goscelin and Osbert approached the issues of foreigners and rulers in similar ways. Because they were writing soon after the Conquest – Goscelin's 'last datable work is an account of the translation of St Augustine of Canterbury, which occurred on 6 September 1091'⁴² while Osbert's work on Eadburh was possibly written in the 1130s⁴³ – both men were careful to offer no direct criticism of the new king or the Norman bishops in their public works, though in his private letters Osbert was more disapproving.⁴⁴ Osbert, then, was a contemporary of Malmesbury and Huntingdon, while Goscelin was writing earlier, from about 1080 onwards.

One would expect, then, to find similar sentiments with regard to the incoming Normans, particularly in Osbert's work, to those found in the chroniclers. However, there is little evidence of this. Their very reluctance to address the Norman Conquest involved the hagiographers in one of the most subtle forms of discourse. By not mentioning any great upheaval, by treating the influx of foreigners as unworthy of mention, they allowed these texts to be used by English, Norman and other Continental immigrants. In this way, the audience was absorbed into an undefined 'us' who revered the English saint. The hagiographies then serve to create a unified identity without doing so explicitly. This would have served to knit together the communities who had commissioned the texts, too, where they contained women from both Anglo-Saxon and Norman backgrounds.

As in the late Old English texts, Danes, on the other hand, are Other. They are consistently depicted as evil and rapacious, terrorising the helpless inhabitants of England, especially in

⁴² Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 384.

⁴³ *Letters of Osbert*, p. 26.

⁴⁴ *Letters of Osbert*, pp. 3-4.

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Goscelin's *vitae* of the Barking saints.⁴⁵ Their presence, therefore, serves to reinforce the connection between the Israelites and the English as God's Chosen People, while at the same time strengthening the image of the saint. The Danes are part of the cycle of invaders, acting as a punishment sent by God, while the saints show their power over the barbarians, both to harm and to heal. It is perhaps in part because of the proven efficacy of these Anglo-Saxon saints against the outsiders that post-Conquest, Anglo-Norman women were not raised to sanctity.

Ideas of England and the English

In the *vitae*, the discourse of identity is at its most blatant (though not always most effective) in what is actually said about the island of Britain, the land of England, the people inhabiting them and the outsiders who enter there. One of the first things to note is the fluidity of the label for the land under discussion: was it Britain or England? The issue of 'English, I mean, British,' raised by Kumar in *The Making of English National Identity*, is a confusion already somewhat visible in these early works.⁴⁶ Goscelin, for example, opens the *Life of Ethelburga* with a reference to 'Anglian Britain', while Osbert describes Eadburh as one of the glittering jewels which led the world to be lit up by 'the sterile provinces of Britain'.⁴⁷ While a reference to Britain could be meant to include the Celtic regions, and so also cover Wales and Scotland, it more often appears to be used as a synonym for England.

In writing from the period following the Conquest, the issue of just who is English, and what it means to be English, was one surrounded by confusion. While William was a Norman, he was king of the English, making him an English king. The island was still Britain, but the territory within it which is occupied by the Norman invaders was referred to by some as Britain, and by others as England. This confusion was heightened later, once Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* became popular, when

the notion of an ancient British heritage had such a powerful hold on the English

⁴⁵ See, for example, Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 412-413.

⁴⁶ Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 400; "*et infecundis Brittanie prouinciis illuminandus omnis orbis*", Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 285.

imagination that 'Britain' came to be identified with the kingdom of England itself, in explicit distinction from Wales and Scotland.⁴⁸

That, however, was a later development. At the time of Osbert and Goscelin's writing, they had a regular system of nomenclature worked out, apparently based on Bede's work, which retained its influence on later writers. Osbert's remark that Eadburh of Nunnaminster was to illuminate the world seems to refer back to a more Roman view of the island (perhaps because he is working in Latin). He uses 'Britain' almost exclusively for the island, including the land inhabited by the English, while the people, the church, and the language of the inhabitants are 'Anglica'.⁴⁹

Goscelin uses a similar system with some consistency in his *vitae* of the Barking women. The land appears to be called Britain, and the people, language and church are English (or rather Anglian):

Let Anglian Britain rejoice in the Lord, illumined by the sun of justice through its holy protodocor and first bishop, Augustine. Let the sons of Albion rejoice because of the Roman Tiber of Peter, clothed in white at the baptismal font through him, in which he, rising from on high, visited these nations of peoples [*gentium nationes*], and illuminated those sitting in the shadows of idolatry by the radiance of his recognition.⁵⁰

Here we see a mix of references to the area, used with a certain poetic licence. The period referred to was before the expansion of Wessex into all the Anglo-Saxon territories, so any idea of a united people is entirely based on the church. The land is identified as 'Anglian Britain', the area controlled by the Anglians, rather than Saxons or Britons, but later the church is also '*Anglicae ecclesiasticae*'. Given the time in which Goscelin was writing, the difference between Anglian Britain and the Anglian Church was probably not seen as

⁴⁸ Alan MacColl, 'The Meaning Of "Britain" In Medieval and Early Modern Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (2006), 248-69 (p. 249).

⁴⁹ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 285. This phrase seems to be an extension of one used by Bede to describe Abbess Hilda, whose mother had had a vision, discovering in her garments a jewel which "seemed to spread such a blaze of light that it filled all Britain with its gracious splendour." Bede, *HE*, IV: 23, pp. 410-11.

⁵⁰ "*Exultet in Domino Anglica Britannia, per sanctum protodocorem et primum antistitem suum Augustinum sole iustitiae irradiata. Exultent Albiones de Romana Albula Petri, fonte baptismatis per eum candidati, in quo oriens ex alto uisitauit has gentium nationes et illuminauit suae agnitionis iubare in tenebris idolatriae sedentes.*" Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 400.

significant. Perhaps, if one is to translate *Anglicae ecclesiasticae* as 'of the English Church', then one should also translate *Anglica Britannia* as 'English Britain', that area no longer in control of the native Britons.

English Britain, then, is made up of *gentium nationes* – nations of peoples – all of whom were enlightened by Augustine's mission, through the actions of the blessed bishop Gregory. As Goscelin acknowledges in the dedication to Bishop Maurice, his account of the early years of Saint Æthelburh's works was based on Bede's account in the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, and so a similar view of the people inhabiting Britain at the time can be expected. Goscelin has skilfully worked many of Bede's ideas into his opening sentences.

Thus, in the opening paragraph of Æthelburh's *vita*, there is Anglian Britain and the English church.⁵¹ In the third chapter, Britain is made distant from the Roman world, with Theodore being sent '*altero orbi Britanniae*' ('to the other world of Britain'). However, this period is described as being the happiest time for the *Angeles* in their *universa patria*, their whole country, without that country being identified directly with the island of Britain. In fact, the next reference to others, the *finitimis nationibus*, the neighbouring nations, probably identifies other inhabitants of the same island, the Welsh, Scots and Picts. The church of the English, however, is then stretched to include everyone, when the *tota... insula*, whole island, is resounding with holy songs as *una ecclesia* [sic], one church.⁵²

The referents in the *Legend of Edith* appear to be more confused, with Edgar being described as king of 'the whole country of England', while later Edith refuses to inherit from him 'the most extensive and prosperous rule of the British realm'.⁵³ Yet even here, the *most* extensive rule of the British realm was only partial, the British realm being the whole island while the land ruled by Edgar is merely the largest kingdom in the island. Indeed, the dancer from Colbeck arrives at 'the English part of Britain', suggesting that the writer is going back to the

⁵¹ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 400.

⁵² Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 402-3.

⁵³ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 26, 33.

idea of a differentiation between the island and the people.⁵⁴

One of the most interesting issues of English versus British identity appears in the *Legend of Edith*, in the story of how Wulfthryth obtained the relics of St Ywi. The attitudes to the 'natives', the British clergy, in this text clearly show some of the anti-Other sentiment, the identity by opposition, which was so useful in fostering a sense of Englishness:

In her days also some Pictish clergy, who were carrying the holy confessor Ywi around in a casket, fixed his abode in the blessed virgin's holy town and royal habitation as firmly as iron in a rock of adamant.⁵⁵

The narrative evinces some discomfort about the interactions with the Picts. On the one hand, 'they placed this casket of the holy remains [...] upon the altar of the dormition of blessed Edith, and, urged by some good spirit or other, offered him as an involuntary sacrifice'.⁵⁶ The Picts apparently place their saint with Edith willingly, and there is a sense that they are led by a higher power in this action. However, the next day, when they attempted to take St Ywi with them, 'the holy clay, like a massy rock, did not yield to strength nor to numbers'.⁵⁷ It appears that their saint has abandoned them, and Goscelin likens it to the removal of Esau's blessing by Jacob. He points out that the Picts then leave happily enough with the 2,000 Saxon shillings from Wulfthryth:

They, having received the silver like Esau's lentils, went away satisfied with the compensation and yielded up the blessing of their incomparable treasure to the people who had it in their possession. Their holy things were to be an example, transferred from these unworthy men, who had treated them too carelessly, to worthy devotees.⁵⁸

The Picts lost their incomparable treasure, not only because they had placed it on Edith's altar, in effect offering it to her, but also, and more importantly, because they were satisfied with a monetary payment in exchange for it. They were unworthy because they were Picts, not members of the English Church, and so bound to pass their treasures along to the new

⁵⁴ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 82.

⁵⁵ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 74.

⁵⁶ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 74.

⁵⁷ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 74.

⁵⁸ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 74.

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caretakers. Goscelin elsewhere implies a similar idea with the coming of the Normans, who became the keepers of the English saints.⁵⁹

The constant reiteration of the people and the Church as English, whether the land is England or Britain, serves to emphasise the idea that 'English' is the correct term for the inhabitants of the land. The Britons have been replaced, or displaced, and the different tribes and kingdoms of the Angles and Saxons are now one people.

Kings and Kingship

The identity of a nation or kingdom has been considered to be closely tied to the identity of the king. In England, however, the identity of the king appears to have been heavily influenced by the nation (or the land). Even though there was a Danish king for a time, and then a series of Norman kings, England does not appear to have been considered Danish or Norman territory. Rather, there have been, at times, foreign kings of England. Cnut was the Danish king of England, and of the English; William the Bastard was Duke of the Normans and King of the English, but these two territories were never treated as one or given a singular, collective name.

The reason for this is, in large part, to do with the conception of England as Britain, a self-contained unit, either because it was an island or because of the remnants of the idea of Britain as a Roman province. Given Bede's notion that Scotland was separated from the rest of the island by the two firths reaching inland, then England and Britain can be read as one and the same.⁶⁰ However, this does not explain the position of Wales and Cornwall in the scheme.

Another reason for the land remaining as 'England' while the ethnic identity of the king changed can be found in the manner of the inheritance of the kingdom. While bloodline was important in choosing a new king, it does not appear to have been the only consideration.

⁵⁹ Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 418.

⁶⁰ Bede, *HE*, I: 12, pp. 40-41. See also MacColl, 'Meaning of Britain', pp. 259-60.

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The English people also had a say in who ruled them. After the death of Edith's brother, Edward, there was, according to Goscelin, some discussion as to whether Edith should take the throne. This discussion is not recorded in either the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle or Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, and so is probably a tradition maintained only at Wilton. However, Goscelin's narrative makes the discussion sound like an account of a witan, the Anglo-Saxon council of nobles, and gives some detail as to who was there:

Meanwhile the judgement of the leaders and the people coincided and rejected Æthelred because of the murder of his brother; he should not rule, as the fount of Justice, whose right to reign had been bought with his brother's blood, especially because he was not suitable because of his infancy and his position as youngest of the children, and a first-born daughter survived, more worthy of her father's eminence. After discussions along these lines, they all agreed to take Saint Edith from the monastery and elevate her to her father's throne – for women rule among many nations – believing indeed that a lady of mature foresight could govern so great a kingdom better than childish ignorance. A very well-attended assembly of the nobles and the people was held at Wilton, and Ælfhere was the leader and head of the military.⁶¹

Two different reasons are given for rejecting Æthelred as king: his brother was murdered and the rumours blamed Æthelred's mother for it; and he was too young. The reasons for choosing Edith in his place, however, are very interesting. She is the 'first-born daughter', she is 'more worthy of her father's eminence', and, most important, her maturity was seen as more valuable for good governance than simply having a male heir.⁶²

Goscelin gives us some interesting insight into how such a meeting may have taken place. The 'leaders and the people' are unwilling to have the young Æthelred as their king, and 'a very well attended assembly of the nobles and people' was held, with the leader of the military in attendance. There appears to be a desire for strong adult leadership, and perhaps a reluctance to have Æthelred's mother (or some relation of hers) as regent. The main reason

⁶¹ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 51-2.

⁶² It is unclear to whom Goscelin was referring with his remark that "women rule among many nations". The wives of English kings were not considered ruling queens, and there had not been a previous instance of a daughter inheriting the kingdom outright but it is possible that Goscelin had Continental examples in mind. (See, however, Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma & Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. ix).

for this story to be included in the saint's life, of course, is so that she can clearly reject worldly power in favour of heavenly blessings, and also so that Edith can be seen, by her audience, to be being tempted and resist, the only real trial of martyrdom left in a Christian society. There are also strong implications that she would have had to marry Alfhre, as the military leader, in order to rule, another reason for a nun to refuse the kingdom. While the issue of the inheritance of the kingdom is openly addressed here, in relation to the possibility of a saint becoming ruler, any reference to the Conquest and a Norman king on the throne is carefully glossed over.

While an important point for ideas of identity and ethnicity shows up in the transferral of kingship, especially from English to Danish or Norman king, what is most interesting in these texts is the lack of comment on the issue. *Æthelburh's Life* has a passing reference to the 'time when the duke of the Normans, by divine judgement, succeeded to the kingdom of the Angles'.⁶³ It is a result of God's ordination, and so not something to protest about or even discuss in great detail. Likewise, as has already been seen in his Prologue to the *Life of Edith*, Goscelin writes of the passing of the rule from Edward the Confessor to William the Conqueror, as a peaceful and inevitable event, with no mention of armies or repression.⁶⁴ Unlike the council which debated who should be king following Edward the Martyr, the impression left by the Prologue is that of the naturalness of William taking up the throne. He even appears to be related to Edith by the omission of his manner of taking up his reign. The inclusion of the audience in the pronoun 'we' generates a sense of unity, not only in the line of kings, but with the English people ruled by these kings. That William's arrival meant that the audience would include non-English is not acknowledged here, and so further functions to elide the differences in the peoples.

This peacefulness shows up again in the *Translatio*, in a section describing the descent of English kingship:

⁶³ "*tempore cum dux Normannorum diuino iudicio in regnum successit Anglorum*", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 416.

⁶⁴ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 23.

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To King Æthelred, the brother of the holy virgin, there succeeded his sons, first Edmund, then Edward, and between these came Canute, king of the Danes; for thus the almighty governor of kingdoms determined; and Canute, a member of the royal family by adoption, gained the rule from Edmund, together with Edward's mother Emma, just as king William succeeded Edward.⁶⁵

The royal line appears to be unbroken, with Cnut adopted by the English (through his marriage, presumably), and even King William is part of the happy family through his great-aunt, Emma, wife of King Æthelred the Unready. The point, however, is that he is presented as the natural successor. Without Goscelin entering into discussions on the nature of the Conquest, or having to mention fighting in England, William is accepted as king, which serves to cement his place as king of the English, establishing a united identity which included English and Continental immigrant under the one ruler.

It is not difficult to understand why so little was made of the Norman Conquest in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Both Osbert and Goscelin, writing for the Anglo-Saxon nunneries, also had to be aware of their superiors, who were almost exclusively Norman. Both writers dedicated their works to Norman bishops, and they take some care to explain events (or, in Osbert's case, the significance of names) which may have been strange to the newcomers. However, while they are negotiating the issues raised by *differences* of identity, they also provide a basis for unified identity by presenting the new king as part of the established order and by propagating the assumption that there is one people ruled by him.

All the examples in this section are from Goscelin's *Legend of Edith*. This is because he addresses the Conquest, especially in this text, while Osbert does not. In large part, this could be because of Goscelin's dedication of the *Legend* to Archbishop Lanfranc, himself an immigrant, a 'green Englishman' from Lombardy.⁶⁶ Thus Goscelin's glossing over of the Conquest and presentation of William the Conqueror as the natural successor to Edward the Confessor could also have been influenced by his desire to legitimate the Norman presence

⁶⁵ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, p. 77.

⁶⁶ 'rudis Anglus', Malmesbury, *GRA*, p. 536.

in England. However, Goscelin's *Life of Ethelburga*, also dedicated to a Norman bishop, is concerned mostly with the Danes, while his *Life of Wulfhild* appears to be presented more for a local community and so has more bearing on local identity. It is possible that Goscelin picked a different theme on which to base the different *vitae*. Osbert, in contrast, does not address the issue of kingship with reference to recent kings. His main focus on English kings is further back in the past, in the Golden Age of Alfred and his successors down to Edgar.

The Golden Age

One of the concepts frequently used to construct an ethnic or national identity is the idea of a Golden Age in the past, when the people were great. This Golden Age is used as a point to look back on, to be proud of, but also sometimes as an example of what *can* be again in the future. Bede's vision of the English People united by their Church was a trope used by later writers, including Malmesbury and Huntingdon, to describe the Golden Age of the English. It was usually portrayed as being instigated by King Alfred, but more fully realised by his descendants, down to Edgar the Peaceful (r. 959-975). While Osbert and Goscelin both start many of their saints' *vitae* by looking back to a Golden Age, when the king worked closely with the Church to produce a stable nation, they see the perfect union as happening at different times.

Goscelin's introduction to his *Life of St Ethelburga*, the *vita* of the earliest saint of Barking, returns to the very beginning of the English Church and its effect on the English. Following on from the reference to Augustine bringing light to the nations of peoples quoted earlier, he says,

And so in these first times of the English church, being born and nourished in Christ, there flourished the young Eorconwald of great natural ability, the great hope for the advancement of the Church, a pupil of the most blessed and eloquent bishop Mellitus, who on a mission from the blessed bishop Gregory succeeded the outstanding Augustine in preaching the gospel of God and became the third in the metropolitan diocese of Canterbury.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ "His igitur primis temporibus nascentis uel lactentis in Christo Anglicae ecclesiae floruit almae indolis puer Erkenuualdus, plurima spes prouectionis ecclesiasticae, auditor inexplebilis beatissimi pontificis Melliti, qui beati episcopi

Goscelin refers back to the founding of the English church by Augustine, and the line of connection between Eorconwald, Æthelburh's brother, and the blessed bishop Gregory. Being the pupil of one directly sent by the father of the English Church, Æthelburh gains holiness by association. That she went on to become a saint herself is of great significance to the importance of Barking; it shows that its foundation has a close, if indirect, connection to the great Pope. Despite the nations of peoples and the multiplicity of tribes on the island, there is one Church for the whole island, formed from the mission to Canterbury, because of the vision of Gregory the Great.

Similarly, in the third chapter, Goscelin describes,

the happiest times of the English when the whole land, and the one faith and agreement of the Christian kings, obeyed one bishop, and the kings themselves were an object of fear to the neighbouring peoples, because they were strong in God[...]; when among the heavenly teachings in the churches there were those who were eminent in the divine learning; who knew the Greek and Latin language as well as their native tongue, and praised the glory of the Trinity in the triple tongue; when the whole island made the holy nuptials and sacraments resound with holy songs as one church, which up to that time only Kent had held, or had spread forth to few others.⁶⁸

While he is describing a time before the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were unified, the Church serves to hold the 'English' together under one faith and one bishop. In return for their faith, the kings are feared by the 'neighbouring peoples', those who are not the 'English' and not joined in the Church. These are the Other, represented as living in fear, outside of the joy spread by the Church, while the kings themselves, in the plural, are in agreement.

Thus, this glorious age being described almost overshadows the issue of different kingdoms, the lack of actual unity, and the different times at which the kingdoms accepted the Christian

Gregorii missione prestantissimo Augustino in euangelium Dei succenturiatus, in sedem metropolitanam Doroberniae successit tertius." Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 400-401.

⁶⁸ "O tunc felicissima Anglorum tempora cum universa patria et unica Christianorum regum fides atque concordia uni pareret episcopo ipsique reges terrori essent finitimis nationibus ut robustiores in Domino; [...] cum inter caelestia dogmata passim per ecclesias diuinae scolae florerent quae et Grecam et Latinam linguam sicut patriam nossent et Trinitatis gloriam triplici uoce celebrarent; cum sacris cantibus diuinas nuptias et sacramenta tota personaret insula ut una ecclesia, quos hactenus sola tenuerat uel paucis effuderat Cantia", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 403

faith. There is one sign of this chronology of conversion in the last clause quoted above. However, the point there is that, with the whole island resounding to the songs, it acts as one church, where before there had been disparate kingdoms and peoples.

Goscelin's comment referring to the 'native language' as a single entity indicates another important element in the reiteration of a unified people. It suggests that they spoke one language, a valuable tool upon which many later national movements were to be based. Here the *linguam patriam* is also given very high status, placed alongside Greek and Latin as a language worthy of praising God, in a parallel to the Trinity.

Goscelin's focus in the opening of the *Legend of Edith* is more on the saint's royal nature. The idea of a Golden Age shows up only in chapter nine, in part to illustrate the holiness of the people who attended her:

Also there were at that time people who radiated illumination: Oswald, Archbishop of York, and the precious martyr Elphege, who by the prophecy of holy Dunstan was to be a worthy successor to Saint Æthelwold, and Saint Æthelstan, bishop of the diocese of Wiltshire[...], and other leaders of the church and ministers of religion, of whom a large number then flourished in England, through the encouragement of King Edgar, most devoted to God, and of Saint Dunstan. Such servants, of the utmost chastity, and intermediaries of the divine marriage kindled the soul of Edith, burning with desire for heaven, as if pouring oil onto flames, with the fiery words of the Lord, and sang to her songs of the Lord chosen from the songs of Sion.⁶⁹

The emphasis here is not so much on a Golden Age, but on the crowds of saints with which Edith was surrounded. However, these 'leaders of the church and ministers of religion [...] flourished in England, through the encouragement of King Edgar'. Once again, we see the balance of king and church, and it would appear that this balance leads to the production of saints (though not martyrs). The praise of these English saints is something which creates a sense of value for them, one in part invested in their saintliness, but also in their Englishness. It is a step toward making 'Englishness a subtly more attractive identity for the Normans'.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 35-6

⁷⁰ Thomas, *English and Normans*, p. 13.

Goscelin's Golden Age, then, appears to be the time when Christianity was being spread throughout England, with perhaps a 'Little Golden Age' around the time of King Edgar. Osbert, on the other hand, looks back to the pre-Conquest history of England as the time of peace and prosperity. Writing about Edith of Wilton's great-aunt, Eadburh of Nunnaminster, he depicts King Alfred as the great founder of a great nation:

His knowledge of the scriptures, as we read, was so outstanding that he excelled in the studies of philosophy as a perfectly eloquent speaker right to his finger-ends, and as a learned interpreter translated almost the whole testament into the idiom of his father tongue.⁷¹

The interaction here goes both ways: God placed Alfred as king of the English people (*populo Anglorum*), and in return, Alfred worked to increase the spread of the true religion. This is kingship as it was thought it should be, modelled on the successful Old Testament kings, such as David and Solomon. There is no mention of the comments made in Alfred's Preface about the decline in learning causing a need to translate key texts into Anglo-Saxon.⁷² Rather, the focus is on the skill of the king in performing the translation.⁷³

The kingship of the Angles, a people unified through Alfred's work, is again presented by Osbert as a natural thing. There is no mention of Wessex's conquest of the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, only a passing comment (as with the Conquest) on the people and the king as an established fact. The narrative starts with a unified front, and so absorbs the audience into an unspecified 'us'. The *lingua patria*, the native tongue, too, is part of this image of kingship, as a language spread and encouraged by Alfred's push to translate important Latin works into English.

⁷¹ "Cuius in Scripturis tanta legitur extitisse scientia, ut in phylosophie studiis ad unguem usque perfecte disertus orator existeret, et facundus interpres totum fere testamentum in idioma lingue paterne transferret." Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 263-4.

⁷² Alfred's Preface to Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*, see for example, *Translations of Old English Prose*, ed. and trans. by A. Cook and C. Tinker (London & New York: Ginn & Co., 1908), pp. 101-2.

⁷³ While there is some doubt as to whether Alfred personally translated either the Old or New Testament into Anglo-Saxon (see Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 264, fn. 21), it is clear that Osbert believes that he did.

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The ideal of King and Church working together for the common good is further expounded in chapter eighteen, leading up to Eadburh's translation at the instigation of Æthelwold:

At that time the priesthood and the royal power were in such agreement that, in accordance with the teachings of Plato, kings lived like philosophers, and philosophers governed vices and wrongful desires as if they were pure evangelists of Christ. This is clearly shown by two stars whose splendour and brightness is well recommended to the whole world. At that time Edgar reigned, the son of prince Edmund who had been the brother of the virgin Eadburh, on whom the title of uprightness shone with many qualities. But indeed blessed Æthelwold governed the church at Winchester, he whose great holiness was so well known among the clergy of England, that he is remembered as outstanding for the great excellence of his reputation.⁷⁴

King Edgar is praised as an upright king, working alongside Æthelwold, who was, by Osbert's time, also a saint. Edgar's lineage, and relation to St Eadburh, further emphasises the royal sanctity of both.

For both Goscelin and Osbert, then, Christianity is depicted as the communal principal tying the state and the people of England together. The ideal situation is one where churchmen work alongside royalty for the good of all, and the results are seen in the blossoming of saints. This attractive image of the English serves to further enhance the identity of Englishness.

There are, however, some important differences between the hagiographers in the working out of this perfect state. As mentioned above, Goscelin points back to an earlier period, back to the initial spread of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon Britain. Having read Bede, he focuses on the importance of the Church as the thing which joined the English peoples together. The Church continues to unite the inhabitants of the land, up to his own time. In the Prologue to Wulfhild's *Life*, Goscelin dedicates his work to Maurice, Bishop of London, explaining that he is writing here in part for the new caretakers of these Anglo-Saxon saints, so that they will be

⁷⁴ "Ea tempestate sacerdotium ita concordabat et regnum, ut secundum Platonis sententiam et reges philosophyce uiuerent, et philosophi tanquam nudi euangeliste Christi uiciis et concupiscentiis imperarent. Probabile satis sideribus duobus ostenditur, quorum splendor et claritas mundo spectabilis uniuerso commendatur. Regnabat tunc Ædgarus Ædmundi principis filius, qui sancte uirginis Eadburge germanus extiterat, quem probitatis titulus dote multiplici perlustrabat. Beatus uero Ætheluuoldus Wintoniensem regebat ecclesiam, cuius tanta sanctitas inter pontifices Anglie fuisse dinoscitur, ut pre nimia claritatis excellentia ineffabilis extitisse memoretur." Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 289-90

equipped to respond to those who doubt the efficacy of the saints. Despite being Flemish, he champions the Anglo-Saxon saints to the incoming churchmen. He states this more clearly in the dedication of *The Life of Ethelburga*, again addressing Bishop Maurice:

It is fitting therefore, O prince of the Church, that you, as being a friend of the bridegroom, should not only accept these things, but also speak up loudly in defending them against foolish people.⁷⁵

Goscelin's offers this Anglo-Saxon female saint's *vita* to the bishop to provide him with examples or proof of the saint's effectiveness.

Osbert, on the other hand, sees the 'English Church and People' as being at their best in the tenth century. Edgar and Æthelwold working together on the Benedictine Reform was the high point, and there is a sense of indirect criticism of the current regime which is found more directly in his letters. Æthelwold's action in translating Eadburh was performed for the advancement of the 'whole Church of the English':

And so the renowned priest of God, Æthelwold, seeing that the holy virgin Eadburh was radiant with such great miracles, and that she did not lack self-confidence in shining forth with such great merits in heaven before the face of God, decided that she should be moved from her tomb to a silver casket, to which the divine grace directed him in his gracious purpose by the signs of its goodwill. For he had been forewarned by frequent visions inspired by the Lord that it would be honourable and useful to move forward as swiftly as possible to undertake this task, and that it would tend to the well-being and advancement of the whole church of the English.⁷⁶

While Æthelwold was involved in translating many other saints, the text for Nunnaminster clearly values this saint, *their* saint, for the whole church.

The similarity of phrasing and imagery between Osbert's Golden Age and that of Goscelin

⁷⁵ "Decet ergo te, O princeps ecclesiastice, ut amicum sponsi et obsequiorem Dominice sponsae, non solum hec suscipere uerum etiam contra temerarios latratus defensare", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 398.

⁷⁶ "Videns itaque preclarus sacerdos Domini Æthelwoldus tantis beatam uirginem Eadburgam choruschare miraculis, quam immensis in celo ante uultum Dei non diffidebat radiare meritis, eam de tumulo transferri ad thecam argenteam disposuit, cuius benigne uoluntatis uestigia in beneplacito suo gratia diuina direxit. Crebris enim reuelationibus Domino fuerat inspirante premonitus, ut tam honestum et utile citius aggrediretur inchoare negotium, et ad totius Anglorum ecclesie utilitatem perducere et profectum." Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 292.

indicates a shared ideal of unity between king and Church, despite their placing that Golden Age at different periods in the past. This is a valuable concept, not only for the good it does the Church and the saints, but because it speaks of the hope for a unified people again in the future. Goscelin appears to have needed to see the Church as having declined, so that the arrival of the Normans can be described as part of the cleansing process, allowing the Church to grow, strengthened by the trials of the past. Osbert, according to some of the letters he wrote, had reason to feel passed over by the Normans, so he saw the English Golden Age as the time before the coming of the invaders.

Danish Invasions

Another significant defining concept for any nation or people is that of the Other, the people who are not us. For the English, during much of the time prior to the arrival of the Normans, this Other was the Danes.⁷⁷ According to the Anglo-Saxon chroniclers, poets, and preachers, the Danes were barbaric invaders, pagans, who attacked harmless people, looted, raped and stole.

After the Norman Conquest, the Danes were still represented in much the same way. Their barbarity was shown in contrast to the peacefulness of the English, thus further cementing 'Englishness' as a positive virtue. Some works by Norman writers did tend to shade the English as barbarians, but it was the works of the hagiographers which would have had a wider audience, and so a more lasting effect. In a similar way, '[e]ven in Æthelræd's reign, when Christianity was penetrating Scandinavia, the English stories continued to depict an oversimplified struggle between English Christians and Viking pagans'.⁷⁸

Danish invasions are treated very differently depending on the nunnery involved. Goscelin, in the *Legend of Edith* at Wilton does not mention Danes other than Cnut. But Danes appear regularly in the *Life of Ethelburga*. Osbert refers to them in passing in the *Vita Edburge*, as something which affected the wealth of Nunnaminster more than anything else. The obvious

⁷⁷ Thomas, *English and Normans*, p. 27.

⁷⁸ Thomas, *English and Normans*, pp. 27, 28.

reason for the difference in significance of the invaders is the location of the different nunneries. Both Wilton and Nunnaminster were far enough from the Danelaw and from the route by which the marauders came, and so they were protected. Barking, on the other hand, was on the seaward side of London and so an easy target.

Osbert does not spare the Danes in his description of them. They are a *barbarus ... populus* from *ferocis Dacie*.⁷⁹ They

compelled the unarmed and captive populace to endure being driven out, they rejoiced in the spoils and plunder [gained from] these wretched ones. And so, in this land, madness broke out with gnashing of teeth, and as many of the afflicted as it could ransom, it ransomed harshly with gold and silver.⁸⁰

The contrast between the barbarous and ferocious invaders and the unarmed and captive populace is stark and unforgiving. The Danes were not a people who had any right to the land or spoils.

In this *vita*, the Danes are depicted as mad and wild, but there is little sign of them being a punishment from God. Goscelin, on the other hand, appears to see the Danes as being ordained by God to bring the English back to the true faith, much as God had used other pagans, such as the Assyrians, to remind the Israelites of their dependence on him.⁸¹ Thus, in the *Life of Ethelburga*, we find the situation described thus:

Under King Ethelred, when the armies of the Danes, holding all the affairs of God in the balance, were wearing out the regions of Anglia in continual warfare, an enemy cohort came to the monastery of the blessed Æthelburh, not so much to attack it as to despoil it.⁸²

⁷⁹ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 293. ("barbarous people from wild Dacia". Dacia, in the area of Transylvania, is possibly being used as a general name for barbarians, those people out there.)

⁸⁰ "*uulgus inerme atque captiuum pati cogeret exterminium, spoliis gaudebat atque direptione miserorum. Hacque in patria debachatur frendens insania, et quoscumque afflictos redimere poterat, argento et auro crudeliter redimebat.*" Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 293.

⁸¹ Compare with Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, in *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. by Dorothy Bethurum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 267-75.

⁸² "*Sub rege Ethelredo cum Domini omnia librantis examine Danorum exercitus Anglicas regiones assiduis bellis attriuisset, uenit hostilis cohors ad beatae Ethelburgae monasterium non tam as expugnandum quam as depredandum.*" Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 412-3.

The Danes are acting under God's authority, and the miracle which follows illustrates this further. While 'the temple and bodies of the saints were lacking in protection', God sends wild animals to guard the entrances to the church where the saints lie, resulting in the conversion of the would-be despoilers:

At length, through the beast, they were cured of their bestial wildness, and understanding that they had been kept away by divine influence, they prayed to the saints presiding over the place to let them enter in peace. Straightaway, the animal gatekeepers granted them entrance, now making peace with those who were practising peace, and they entered with devotion, which they had been entirely unable to do with ferocity, and where they had sought for booty they sacrificed plentiful gifts of food for the sisters, enough to last for a whole month.⁸³

Wild animals, traditionally images of ferocity, are depicted as more reasonable than these invaders. However, the relationship between the animals and the Danes leads the Danes to an understanding of the power of the saints. The contrast of the bestial wildness which is then turned to peace illustrates the force of the Danes' conversion. At the same time, the invaders, now repentant, are accepted into the church, an image of the willingness of the English Church to allow the Other to convert. This acceptance indicates that the discrimination is of a religious, rather than an ethnic, nature, despite the animalistic descriptions of the Danes. For an audience which was not composed entirely of English, this recognition of a multi-ethnic Church under the umbrella of the English would ease the identification with the Church, and thus with the English.

The other repeated discourse in Goscelin's accounts of the Danish invasions is the power of the English saint, not only to protect herself and her church from attack, but also her power to heal and forgive. When a 'pagan throng of that same tribe' attempts to ransack the monastery at a different time, one of the men falls off a ladder and appears to be dead,⁸⁴

⁸³ *"templumque et corpora sanctorum uacabat custodia, [...] Tandem per bestias a bestiali feritate correcti et intelligentes se diuinitus extrudi, orant sanctos loci presides se cum pace ammitti. Protinus ingressum prebuere ianitores beluae, pacis cultoribus iam paciferae, ingrediunturque cum deuotione qui nullatenus poterat cum immanitate, atque ubi predam quesierant, copiosa dona ad deuotione uictum sororum integro mense sufficientem sacrificant."* Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 413.

⁸⁴ *"eiusdem gentis paganissima turba"*, Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 413.

So his companions, considering the divine wrath, condemned his impiety, and carrying his body, over which they grieved, to the tomb of the most holy virgin Æthelburh, prayed with tears that through her intercession they might gain pity for themselves and life for their lost companion. Wonderful was the faith of the barbarians, and wonderful the bounty of the divine favour, and admirable the grace of God given through the kindness of the saints. Those who had come as persecutors were listened to as intercessors for him who had borne the arms of wickedness.⁸⁵

Again, the Danes are shown as capable of repenting and being forgiven, but it is the 'grace of God through the kindness of the saints' which brings this repentance about. The man who was healed is described now as having been changed:

Far from being a wolf he was transformed into a lamb, his ferocity was tamed, his haughty neck was subdued to the gentle handmaid of Christ, his insolent tongue now prayed to the Saviour, and from being an enemy he became a faithful servant.⁸⁶

While the man is transformed, the catalogue of what he is now *not* serves to further distance the Danes from those whom they attacked. This depiction and vilification of the Other reinforces the nobleness of the English, while leaving an opportunity for change from Other into 'us'.

English Focus

While Goscelin presents the Anglo-Saxon saints to the Normans, it is Osbert who has a very English focus in his work. Not only did he write *vitae* of other English saints, but he also comments frequently on the Englishness of people and places which show up in his narratives. Within the *Vita Edburge*, he repeatedly emphasises English names, whether he is commenting on the meaning of Eadburh ('fortunate, or blessed, city'), or the nickname given to a beneficiary of one of her miracles (Ælric the Crawler).⁸⁷ In the letter prefixed to this work, he refers not only to his own Englishness (labelling himself an '*indigena*'), but also to his pride

⁸⁵ "Hinc socii, perpendentes caelestem iram, damnant impietatem suam, delatoque funesto corpore ad monumentum sacratissimae uirginis Ethelburgae, orant flebiliter per ipsius suffragia sibi ueniam et perditam uitam. Mira fides barbarorum, mira largitas diuinorum beneficiorum, et uenerabilis gratia Dei in meritis sanctorum. Qui uenerant persecutores exaudiuntur pro nequitiae armigero intercessores", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 413.

⁸⁶ "Nam de lupo in agnum uertitur, truculentus mitigatur, tumida ceruix expugnatae famulae Christi prosternitur, lingua procax Saluatorem deprecatur, ac de hoste fidelis seruus efficitur", Colker, 'Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 414.

⁸⁷ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 262, 295.

in his ancestry and relatives.⁸⁸

As part of his English focus, there is a sense in Osbert's *Vita Edburge* that he is looking back to a glorious Golden Age. His paean of praise of Alfred, through whom 'the teachings of religion were disseminated in the minds of the faithful', is echoed in his description of the harmony throughout the land when 'the priesthood and royal power' were in agreement in Edgar and Æthelwold's time.⁸⁹ The king and bishop are shown to have done great things, for the city of Winchester and also for the whole country. There is no direct criticism of a current ruler or of the interactions between the ruler and the church. Rather, the time which he was speaking of is shown to be marvellous.

Osbert, then, took pride in England, her saints, her language and her people, and he took pride in being English himself. He was possibly bitter at being overlooked in preference for Norman churchmen (by a Norman king) and wished to make a point in favour of the saintliness of the English. But Osbert was not man to burn his bridges, as he made reference to the help of the king in collecting stories about St Eadburh.⁹⁰

English Identity After the Conquest

Adrian Hastings writes that

texts can produce peoples. [...] A community, political, religious, or whatever, is essentially a creation of human communication and it is only to be expected that the form of the communication will determine the character of the community.⁹¹

I have argued that the identities of the saints and their nunneries are bound up together. However, saints' *vitae* also interact with and contribute to ideas of national identity, especially the lives of saints who are presented as being of national importance. While Osbert and Goscelin were writing for nunneries, they were also presenting the Anglo-Saxon

⁸⁸ *Letters of Osbert*, pp. 179, 182.

⁸⁹ "religionis per hunc disciplina in mentibus fidelium disseminata conualuit." "Ea tempestate sacerdotium ita concordabat et regnum" Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 263, 289.

⁹⁰ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 283. The king would have been Stephen by that time, since Robinson and Williamson place the composition of Eadburh's *Life* around 1130.

⁹¹ Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*, p. 20.

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female saints to the Norman churchmen as people of importance in the English Church. As such, the hagiographers deal with ideas of Britain, England, and the English Church and people. They have a consistent method for discussing these ideas, calling the island 'Britain', while the largest part of it is occupied by the 'English' people, and therefore called 'England'.

Writing in post-Conquest England, the hagiographers treat the ideas of kingship and Englishness in remarkably similar ways, but from different perspectives. Kings are ordained by God, and so the ruling of the nation can pass from an English king to a Danish king, and on to a Norman king, without there being an issue for the Englishness of the people. However, in Osbert's descriptions of the Danish attacks, one may read a warning for the occupying Normans. The saints are able to protect themselves, but at the same time they are also quick to forgive repentant trespassers.

While other historians have examined saints' *vitae* for concepts of national and ethnic identity, they have largely ignored Anglo-Saxon female saints' *vitae*. However, even when dealing with apparently apolitical texts, valuable discourses of English identity can be found, which may have reached a wider audience than historical chronicles, and so contributed to the dissemination of a concept of Englishness which may have proved compelling for a broad range of people. While the Anglo-Saxon women's *vitae* are not radically different from the male *vitae* in their treatment of various subjects, such as the Golden Age and Danes, the very existence of these texts – works written about women – which were read and heard in nunneries, expands the audience of implicitly and explicitly presented English identities. Women were a part of the reception and dissemination of Englishness, a point which has, in the past, been repeatedly overlooked.

Chapter V

Saints and Englishness

Than fewe dayes aftir, Seynt Awdre toke with hir both hir nonnes and passid over the watir of Humbyr and so come streyght into Hely. And in hir goyng, there was such a stronge hete by the way, that bothe she and hir to nonnes lay and restid hem vnder an hille. And Seynt Awdre picched hir staffe at hir hede in the grounde. It was not so sone in the grounde, but it wax grene and bare grene leues, and with in processe of tyme it grewe in to a grete hoke. Therefore evir aftir that place was and is called Awdre–is Stowe, that is for say Awdre–is resting place, and is nowe made ther a fayre chapell in the worship of Seynt Awdre.

(Life of St Audrey, *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*, fol. 54v)

English women's participation in a developing sense of Englishness, from the thirteenth century onwards, is demonstrated by their reading, and possibly requesting, collections of English saints, and particularly Anglo-Saxon female saints. Saints from the Anglo-Saxon period had an ongoing presence after the Conquest, and their *vitae* continued to be rewritten. Where many English saints' *vitae* were previously written for a particular religious house, by the late thirteenth century they are found attached to larger collections of more universal saints, or in collections of female saints. These later texts illustrate another step in English identity – a concern with local saints from England and other parts of Britain.

Collections of Saints' Vitae and Englishness

Collections of saints' *vitae* came in a range of forms. Some were very general collections, including English saints among much larger numbers of universal saints. Across the various extant manuscripts of the *South English Legendary*, dated to the last quarter of the thirteenth-century, almost one-fifth of the legends included are of Anglo-Saxon saints.¹ Among these are the English women Eadburh, Æthelthryth, Mildrith and Frideswide, along with other British women: Constantine's mother, Helen, Brigit of Ireland, and the Welsh saint Winifred, though no single surviving manuscript contains all seven of these saints.²

¹ Renee Hamelinck, 'St Kenelm and the Legends of the English Saints in the *South English Legendary*' in *Companion to Early Middle English Literature*, ed. by N.H.G.E. Veldhoen and H. Aerston (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988), pp. 21-30 (p. 21).

² Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 141, 166, 174-9. Eadburh is edited in Braswell, and Mildrith in Acker.

Other collections were more focused in their selection of saints. Surviving from the fourteenth century is MS Lansdowne 436, a manuscript which focuses exclusively on England and the English saints. The first item in the manuscript is a short Latin chronicle of the Kings of the Saxons from Hengist to Egbert, relating them to the saints, which is then followed by a substantial collection of Lives of English Saints, starting with the four missionary bishops: Augustine, Lawrence, Mellitus and Paulinus. MS Lansdowne 436 was composed around 1300 and by the fifteenth century it belonged to the church of Saint Mary and Saint Æthelflæd at Romsey.³ This manuscript suggests not only that the Romsey nuns were still properly literate (i.e., able to read Latin) in the fifteenth century, but also that they had an interest in the history of Anglo-Saxon England and the English saints.⁴

Around the same time, in the late thirteenth to early fourteenth century, John of Tynemouth was compiling his *Sanctilogium Angliae, Walliae, Scotiae, et Hiberniae*. This collection, while being 'particularly rich in Welsh saints'⁵, was adapted by later editors and given a new title. It was first printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1516 under the heading *Nova Legenda Anglie*, thus taking an undeservedly Anglo-centric view of the other members of the British Isles. The introduction gives an excuse for this: 'considering that all the Saints were "de ista patria quae nunc Anglia vocatur," and that Ireland, Scotland and Wales "de iure subici debent et obedientes esse tenentur huic regno Angliae".'⁶

In the fifteenth century there was a further step in the nationalising of saints. Not only were English saints collected together, but once again (as in the case of the *South English Legendary*) they were 'Englisht' - written in English.⁷ Pynson's *Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande*, an abbreviated translation of the *Nova Legenda Anglie*, came out in the same year as de

³ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture c. 1150-1300: Virginité and its Authorizations* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 197-8, esp. n. 27. See also the inscription on BL Lansdowne 436, f.1r.

⁴ Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives*, p. 197.

⁵ Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, p. xxiii.

⁶ Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, pp. xxii-xxiii: "of this country which is now called England", "to be under the law, and to hold obedience to this kingdom of England".

⁷ Henry Bradshaw, *The Life of Saint Werburge of Chester*, ed. by Carl Horstmann, EETS, os. 88 (London: Trübner, 1887).

Worde's edition, though it was probably based on an earlier version. As with the *Sanctilogium* and the *Nova Legenda Anglie*, the *Kalendre* includes a substantial number of British female saints. However, as its title suggests, the edition is little more than a calendar with only brief notes on each saint to serve as reminders of who they are and what they have done and can do.⁸

In the second half of the fifteenth century, a manuscript headed *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres* was written.⁹ This text is unique, and the heavy weighting of Anglo-Saxon women's *vitae* anticipates by more than a hundred years *The Lives of Women Saints of Our Contrie of England* (1610-5).¹⁰ While much of the information contained in the Anglo-Saxon saints' *vitae* is translated into vernacular English from the *Nova Legenda Anglie*, the author/ translator/ compiler includes some information which is not available in the printed version of the *Nova Legenda Anglie*.

The fact that English saints' *vitae* were being collected together and then translated into the English language is a valuable marker of developments in the concepts of Englishness. While these texts were not constructed with the design of expressing a national identity, they were nonetheless written under the influence of ideas of Englishness, which ideas are then implicit within them. There is obvious pride in the holy people of the land, and the English language, which had slowly been gathering authority as a written medium, was now being used to celebrate these saints. King John's loss of Normandy in 1204, and the subsequent separation of the English and Norman nobility, began the decline in the use of Anglo-Norman.¹¹ In 1356, recognising that French was no longer useful in legal proceedings, the sherrifs' courts of London and Middlesex changed to using English. However, it was not

⁸ Manfred Görlach, *The Kalendre of the Neue Legende of Englande*, (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1994).

⁹ CUL, MS Add. 2604. The word 'written' for this manuscript is deliberately ambiguous, as it is unclear whether the manuscript is the original, or a copy – though see Blanton, 'Literary Production and Nunneries in East Anglia', who thinks it is a copy, owing to scribal errors.

¹⁰ Henry Bradshaw, *The Lives of Women Saints of our Contrie of England*, ed. by Carl Horstmann, EETS, os. 66 (London: Trübner, 1886).

¹¹ Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 128-9.

really until Henry V (r. 1413-22) that English gained official status. Henry V instated the use of English language in his documents and letters, in large part to foster a sense of national pride, and thus gain funding for his war with the French.¹²

Saints' Vitae and National Identity

How does one go about finding 'national consciousness' in literary texts? Görlach assumes that national pride played a part in the translation of saints' *vitae* into the English language, particularly those of English saints.¹³ Horstmann claims the translator of the *Kalendre* 'vindicates the power of the English saints as against foreign saints'.¹⁴ These scholars consider the selection and translation into the English language of English and British saints as indicating a sense of nation, of Englishness or Britishness, to the compilers and translators.

On the other hand, Katherine J. Lewis sees national pride in the existence of historical works 'which engender a sense of nationhood in their audience by developing readers' (or listeners') consciousness of England's past'.¹⁵ Looking mainly at the *Gilte Legende*, she comments on the establishment of the saints' English status, dates and places, and the places containing their relics.¹⁶ She argues that the saints are 'not just a part of English history, but are presented as figures who also have a part to play in England's present'.¹⁷

Renee Hamelinck finds a narrative thread which runs through the lives of English saints in the *South English Legendary*:

the legends relate the history of the English church from the time when Christianity was first brought to England by St Augustine up to the thirteenth century when the *SEL* was composed. [...] The development of the English church as related in the legends shows how, after a period of prosperity under the Anglo-Saxon kings, its position becomes increasingly weakened after the Norman kings came to power.¹⁸

¹² Baugh and Cable, *A History of English*, pp. 149, 154.

¹³ Görlach, *Kalendre*, p. 7.

¹⁴ Horstmann, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, p. xxi.

¹⁵ Lewis, 'Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives', pp. 160-170, 161.

¹⁶ Lewis, 'Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives', pp. 164-6.

¹⁷ Lewis, 'Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives', p. 166.

¹⁸ Hamelinck, 'St Kenelm', p. 21.

Anne Thompson agrees with this. She associates the English saints' *vitae* in the *South English Legendary* as being a similar form to a chronicle – and one which contains a desire to transmit the history of England which 'at times subverts the identified desire to edify and inculcate devotion in an ignorant laity'.¹⁹ Thompson thus suggests that the compilers of the *South English Legendary* was, at times, distracted from their intention to present <insert quote from SEL about heroic saints and martyrs> by an urge to communicate their ideas of England and English history.

Thorlac Turville-Petre sees national identity in the association of the English saints of the *South English Legendary* with the everyday people:

This humility, so constantly emphasised, is the expression of the saints' identification with simple folk. In this way, by locating national identity among the people of England, a clerical writer can demonstrate the central part that the Church has played and still plays in supporting and representing national interests.²⁰

However, while humility is often mentioned with regards to the saints, both male and female, the texts approach it from different directions. Of the fifteen English male saints edited by D'Evelyn and Mill (both pre- and post- Conquest), only three are kings. The others are all raised to bishop or archbishop, but they are generally from a lower class than the female saints, who are all royal daughters. Thus, the male saints are easier for the common people to identify with, while the female saints bring a different aspect to the Englishness of the *South English Legendary* – the association of royalty with the English people. While the Anglo-Saxon female saints are also described as being humble, this humility is usually situated in the acts of penitence which the saints perform rather than through an association with the common people.

What emerges from the study of the collections of *vitae*, however, is the involvement of women in the dissemination of a sense of Englishness. Not only are Anglo-Saxon women the

¹⁹ Anne B. Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the South English Legendary*, (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2003), p. 12.

²⁰ Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, p. 67.

subject of saints' *vitae*, but Anglo-Norman and English women are requesting collections of female saints and English saints, becoming engaged in the process of rewriting of saints in English, and thus serving to further generate a sense of national consciousness.

Anglo-Saxon Female Saints and English Consciousness

Within the collections of saints' *vitae* from the thirteenth century onwards included in this study, two trends which may be related to one another are apparent with regard to the role of the Anglo-Saxon female saints. The first is the gradual disappearance of Anglo-Saxon women from the collections of national and universal saints. The second is a tightening of the focus in the texts, from national saints to collections entirely composed of such women.

The disappearance of the Anglo-Saxon women from the collections which contain a mix of national and universal saints is an irregular process. The *South English Legendary*, possibly composed as an English revision of the *Legenda Aurea*, initially incorporated a greater proportion of English and Anglo-Saxon saints. According to the table of contents, the Vernon manuscript was meant to include Æthelthryth, Mildrith, Eadburh, and Frideswide, though the last is now missing from the manuscript.²¹ Later recensions appear to have dropped many of the female saints, while retaining the male saints. This may have been due to particular local veneration, but the lack of Anglo-Saxon female saints in areas where the saints are remembered is harder to explain.²² A later translation of the *Legenda Aurea*, the *Gilte Legende*, also added English saints, but only one female – Frideswide. In printing the *Gilte Legende*, Caxton omitted even her life, and so only English male saints were published.²³

It seems, therefore, that, in the composition of mixed collections of saints' *vitae* from England and the Continent, Anglo-Saxon female saints are not considered important. While Anglo-Saxon male saints appear to be part of a national consciousness, and take their place on the stage of spiritual battle alongside saints from the East, from Rome, Brittany, and other parts

²¹ See Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 133-219.

²² Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, p. 33.

²³ And are recorded today, as modern editions of the *Gilte Legend* are based on Caxton's printing: *The Golden Legend: or, Lives of the saints / as Englished by William Caxton* (London: Dent, 1900).

of the Continent, the Anglo-Saxon female saints seem to disappear. On the other hand, in collections of British or English saints, the women hold their own. Of the forty-seven saints in MS Lansdowne 436, sixteen are women – more than one-third. Tynemouth similarly included a substantial number of women – 30 out of 168 in Wynkyn de Worde's printed edition,²⁴ while the translation printed by Pynson has 121 saints, with 29 of them women – nearly one quarter.²⁵ This impulse to collect English saints in turn led to collections of English female saints, with the *Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres* including them with other universal female saints, while a much later collection, printed in 1615, is titled *The lives of Women Saints of our Contrie of England*.

In the prologues of both Tynemouth's collection and the translation of it, the history of the English people and the English church is held up as very important. The author and the translator are concerned that

ryght fewe of this realme of Englande, specyally of þe comen people, haue harde of any suche men, in soo moche þat þe oonly herynge of theyr names wyll be a lernynge to most men; and so it wyll be of dyuerse other blessyd men and women that were borne in this realme, which haue done many notable thynges for the comen welthe of the people therof as well profytable for this lyfe as for þe lyfe to come, as Seynt Dunstane, Seynt Deusdedit, Seynt Wylfryde, Seynt Oswalde, Seynt Cedd and Seynt Chadde bysshoppes; Seynt Ethelbert, Seynt Edwyn, Seynt Edgare and Seynt Oswalde kyngys; Seynt Sexburgh & Seynt Ermenylde quenes; Seynt Wallen, Seynt Gylbert, Seynt Wulrkye and dyuerse other holy men and women, as in the sayde legende and also in this treatyse apperyth.²⁶

Here, both men and women, bishops, kings, queens and abbesses, are named as saints who have worked for the 'comen welthe of the people', associating these saints both with the realm of England, and with the inhabitants.

Whereas the prologue spells out this national concern in de Worde and Pynson's editions, it is the selection which speaks loudest in *Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*. The English female

²⁴ Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, pp. 9-12.

²⁵ Görlach, *Kalendre*, pp. 47-50.

²⁶ Görlach, *Kalendre*, p. 44

saints are all well-known and well-recorded, at least by the thirteenth century, while the three men in the collection are universal, and the universal female saints are those who were virgin martyrs, or who persuaded their husbands to become Christians.

While many of these collections include a substantial number of Anglo-Saxon female saints, the focus of this study is still those saints who are remembered at the nunneries founded before the Conquest. Other Anglo-Saxon female saints will be discussed where their *vitae* have particular relevance to the argument.

Latin Texts

MS Lansdowne 436

MS Lansdowne 436 is a collection showing a special interest in English heritage. The vellum manuscript dates from the fourteenth century, and an inscription in it indicates that it was owned by Romsey Abbey.²⁷ The first item in the manuscript is a brief (four folios), unique chronicle of Saxon Kings from Hengist to Egbert, with the first two folios suffering from having an inch to an inch and a half cut away at the outside margin.²⁸ The history of England is then followed by a collection of lives containing a mix of male and female saints, all of whom are connected with Anglo-Saxon England. There is no sign of Scottish or Irish saints (Winifred, a Welsh border saint, is included, though her veneration by Norman kings may indicate that she was considered English or part of their colonising of Wales); Augustine is included, as is Paulinus, but Gregory is not. The most recent saint is Bishop Wulfstan (died 1095). The focus of the collection, therefore, appears to be firmly on the Anglo-Saxon past.

Both the *vitae* of Eadburh and Ælfflæd open with their relationships to kings. Indeed, Ælfflæd does not appear to be very important in her own *vita*, as her name does not appear until 21 lines in, after a description of King Edgar's generosity in giving his loyal nobleman a wife of near kin to the Queen. This is very different from the more formulaic 'St X, daughter of King Y', perhaps reflecting the distance between Ælfflæd and the royal family.

²⁷ Liveing, *Romsey Abbey*, p. 19. BL, MS Lansdowne 436, f.1.

²⁸ Just the right size to be used in the binding of a quire.

The Life of Æthelthryth is brief and, as it claims, based very closely on Bede's *historia gentis anglorum*. It is combined with even briefer chapters on her sisters (not based on Bede), and while it does not directly discuss the nature of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms at the time, between them the daughters of King Anna of the East Angles manage to cover much of Anglo-Saxon England and even extend to the continent. While Æthelthryth's second husband is identified as King Ecgrith, there is no mention of where he was king. However, her first husband is named 'Tonbert, prince of the South Gyrwas' (in Kent), and her sister Seaxburh is married to Eorconbert, king of Kent. The chapters on Æthelthryth's sisters cover the departure of the elder sister, Æthelburh, to Gaul, where she became abbess of Brie, while Seaxburh had two daughters, the 'great and virtuous virgin' Eorcongota, who also became abbess of Brie, and the holy queen Eormenhild, mother of St Werburh and wife of Wulfhere, king of Mercia. Æthelburh's *vita* ends with a vignette of her lying incorrupt in Gaul, while her sister, Æthelthryth, is similarly preserved in East Anglia, the two of them spreading their protection over these lands. This is a regionalist perspective, suggesting both a separation of the peoples involved, and an association between two territories united by the saintly sisters.

Thus the sisters and their offspring are connected to Kent, East Anglia, Mercia, Northumbria, and Gaul, perhaps suggesting why they were so popular throughout Anglo-Saxon England. Werburh has her own *vita* in the collection, but the fourth daughter of King Anna, Wihtburh, does not even have a 'life', as the commentary on her starts with her translation by Brihtnoth, and the discovery of her incorrupt body. This reflects the much later addition of her *vita* to the Ely legend.

***John of Tynemouth* – Nova Legenda Angliæ**

Carl Horstmann argues that John of Tynemouth was one of the many chroniclers produced by St Albans, 'the seat of English historiography.'²⁹ Along with the *Nova Legende Angliæ*, Tynemouth wrote a *Historia Aurea*. Horstmann points out that, where others see a gap in the

²⁹ Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, p. xiv. The Latin text of the female saints' Lives will not be discussed here, as they are covered in English in the sections on both *The Kalendre of the Newe English Legende* and *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*, below.

annalists from 1327-1376, between Henry de Blancford and Thomas Walsingham,

the vacuum does not exist, the series of writers is unbroken. *The gap is exactly covered by John of Tynemouth's Historia aurea down to 1347, and his continuator in MS. CCCC6 down to 1377; and his name is the connecting link between the older and younger annalists of St. Albans.* If this fact has hitherto been overlooked, it is because his chronicle of the first half of Edward's [III] reign is an integral part of his universal history. [Horstmann's italics]³⁰

Thus, John of Tynemouth, probably the vicar of Tynemouth from c.1315-25, seems especially interested in history, and particularly the history of England (or Britain).³¹ Horstmann paints him as an avid compiler, who brought together a truly astonishing amount of material to furnish an almost inexhaustible collection of English, Irish, Welsh and Scottish saints:

generally the saints omitted *are* omitted because a life did not exist, or, as in the case of many Irish Saints, was out of his reach. His knowledge of English hagiography is truly astonishing.³²

This collection is made more valuable because the writer rarely interferes with the information which he found in the sources. While this might call into question the historicity of some of the events described, for the sake of studying the development of ideas about certain saints, and British concepts of British saints in general, this is a valuable method:

He uses no criticism, is not sceptical, takes everything for granted that comes under his notice, even the most marvellous or incredible, is of unlimited credulity, and delights especially in gruesome tales. [...] He always gives as little as possible of his own, makes no remarks, and simply lets his sources speak.³³

While Tynemouth labelled his work *Sanctilogium Angliae, Walliae, Scotiae, et Hiberniae*, a later revision, possibly as it was being prepared for printing, renamed it *Nova Legenda Angliæ*, deeming that the Welsh, Scottish and Irish saints belonged, with their lands, under the title and rule of England.³⁴ This act of colonization probably went against the original intention

³⁰ Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, p. xlix. His italics.

³¹ Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, p. xxxvi

³² Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, p. xxix.

³³ Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, p. lii.

³⁴ Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, pp. xxii-xxiii.

of the collection. Horstmann notes that it is 'particularly rich in Welsh saints', and surmises that the material was collected in groups of national saints, starting with the Welsh and later adding English, Irish and Scots groups.³⁵ Thus it appears that the originating impulse may have been a consciousness of Welsh national identity, which was then spread to other areas of the British Isles. John Capgrave, whose name is more commonly associated with the *Nova Legenda Anglie*, is probably only responsible for the rearrangement of the text from the calendar order of MS London, British Library Cotton Tiberius E 1, from St Albans, to the alphabetical version which was later printed by Wynkyn de Worde.³⁶ The text itself will be more closely examined in the Middle English forms below, both in the *Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande* and in the *Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*.

The impulse to create a collection of saints' *vitae* argues for a consciousness of the group. By compiling collections of local and national saints, whether it be saints of the British Isles as in Tynemouth's original concept or those of England as 'rightful' head of the British Isles, the author first defines a group and then associates his subjects with that group. The resulting text then serves to disseminate the concept of this group as a unit among the audience of readers and listeners, encouraging the growth of an idea of Englishness.

Middle English Texts

South English Legendary

The one thing that people who have worked on the *South English Legendary* (SEL) agree on is that there is little to agree on. In one of the more recent studies, Anne B. Thompson opens with this whimsy:

Once upon a time, somewhere in the west of England, sometime towards the end of the thirteenth century, someone decided to put together a collection of stories about saints. This collection was so popular with – well, we really have no idea with whom – but someone, apparently, as over sixty manuscript copies of it had been made by the end of the fifteenth century.³⁷

³⁵ Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, pp. xxiii-xxiv, xxv.

³⁶ Horstman, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, pp. ix, lxvi-lxvii.

³⁷ Thompson, *Everyday Saints*, p. 3.

This nicely sums up all that is currently *known* about the *Legendary*, which appears over a range of years, in different dialects. Speculation runs rife, and where some people have made suggestions, others have taken them for certainties. One of the most comprehensive individual studies to date remains that of Görlach, published in 1974.³⁸ His survey of the manuscripts known at the time has been supplemented by further studies, and additional manuscripts.³⁹

Using the English legends inserted throughout the collection, Görlach argues for the project being initiated in or around Worcester, as

only the alleged Worcester provenance of the collection at once explains the prominence of Wulfstan, Oswald bp., Edward mart., and Athelwold *and* the inclusion of the 'additional' [only found in a few manuscripts] saints Guthlac, Ethelbert, Edburga, Etheldreda, Mildrith, Frideswide, Birin and Egwine.⁴⁰

However, he cautions that this needs 'further confirmation from evidence drawn from the style and the sources'.⁴¹ Others have accepted his findings with more certainty, with Renee Hamelinck opening her work, 'When the *SEL* was composed in the Worcester area at the end of the thirteenth century'.⁴²

However, Hamelinck does go on to produce some support for this enthusiasm, finding a theme within the texts on English saints that is not immediately apparent when focusing on the life of one individual. According to Hamelinck:

Together the legends relate the history of the English church from the time when Christianity was first brought to England by St Augustine up to the thirteenth century when the *SEL* was composed. [...] The development of the English church as related in the legends shows how, after a period of prosperity under the Anglo-Saxon kings, its position becomes increasingly weakened after the Norman kings came to power.⁴³

³⁸ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*.

³⁹ O.S. Pickering, and Manfred Görlach, "A Newly Discovered Manuscript of the *South English Legendary*", *Anglia*, 100 (1982), 109-123.

⁴⁰ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, p. 36.

⁴¹ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, p. 36.

⁴² Hamelinck, 'St Kenelm', p. 21.

⁴³ Hamelinck, 'St Kenelm', p. 21.

While some of the *South English Legendary* manuscripts do contain a prologue, in two different versions, neither prologue gives an explanation of the use of English as a language, or the inclusion of English saints.⁴⁴ They are not indicated in any specific way, and no two manuscripts contain the same collection of English saints.

Thorlac Turville-Petre makes the claim that

[t]he emphasis is upon the saints of England, and yet, unlike John of Tynemouth's early fourteenth-century *Nova Legenda Anglie*, the *South English Legendary* is not restricted to English figures.⁴⁵

But it is puzzling to see how he can find an emphasis on English saints. Overwhelmingly, the saints are universal, with a sprinkling of English saints. The prologue repeatedly states that it is dealing with the battle for Christendom, with no mention of Englishness, English saints, or even the English language. Indeed, the prologue would have one believe that the *vitae* contain more tales of fighting and martyrs than actually appear.

Despite having read Görlach's work on the *South English Legendary*, where he painstakingly points out the improbability of it being based on the Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, Virginia Blanton states that

[t]he *South English Legendary* was largely based on Jacobus's *Legenda Aurea*, in which few British saints are recorded. The appearance of any native figures in the *South English Legendary*, therefore, demonstrates some desire to reshape the *LgA* in accordance with devotion to local saints.⁴⁶

Görlach, however, based his hypothesis about the formation of the work, that 'the legends were either prompted by the liturgical texts for the respective feast days, or at least felt to be connected with them', on the statement in the prologue that the narrator will:

Telle... bi rewe of ham . as hare dai valþ in þe 3ere

⁴⁴ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, p. 8.

⁴⁵ Turvill-Petre, *England the Nation*, p. 61.

⁴⁶ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 21-29, see especially p. 25-26. Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 238.

Verst bygynneþ at 3eres day . for þat is þe uerst feste
And fram on to oþer so areng . þe wile þe 3er wol leste. (Prologue: ll. 6-68)⁴⁷

There is some attempt to arrange the *vitae* in calendar order in many of the manuscripts, lending further weight to Görlach's argument, though many of the later ones are more varied in the order of their presentation. Again, Görlach explains that

the collection(s) must for some time have been considered as 'open texts' with no closely defined scope, from which omissions could be made, or to which new legends could be added at the pleasure of the individual user, or whenever the collection was put to a new use or transferred to a different diocese.⁴⁸

It therefore follows quite naturally that local saints would be added, and new saints' *vitae* written up. The inclusion of national saints in collections of universal saints is something seen in other collections in other places. 'National saints tended to become appended to or inserted into *LgA* manuscripts in different European countries.'⁴⁹ The effect on the *South English Legendary* appears to be a natural consequence of both the existence of the collection and the existence of a sense of pride in national saints. On the one hand, there is the idea of the 'local boy or girl made good'; on the other, the apparent desire for 'our' saints to be ranked alongside the better-known universal saints.

While Turville-Petre argues that the local importance is further depicted by the humility of the national saints found in the *South English Legendary*, there is no obvious difference in the terms used to describe national saints as compared to the universal ones.⁵⁰ Indeed, for the Anglo-Saxon female saints in the *South English Legendary*, humility is not noticeable outside of the formulas associated with royal saints. Much more weight is placed on the accounts of their high status due to their birth. All that is said of Æthelthryth, for instance, is very formulaic:

⁴⁷ Quotations from the printed edition will be given as text and line number. Charlotte d'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, *The South English Legendary*, EETS, 3 vols., (London: Oxford University Press, 1956).

⁴⁸ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, p. 23.

⁵⁰ Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, p. 67.

Clannore lyf ne miht beo þen seint Aldreþ gon lede
Of ffastinge and of orisons and of Almes dede
Of suche goodnesse and holinesse hire folewede i nouh. (*Æthelthryth*: ll. 27-9)⁵¹

More is said of the humility of Eadburh, as the story about her secretly cleaning the shoes of the nuns is related. However, the emphasis is still on the idea of 'Þe kinges dougter of Englonde' (Eadburh: l. 56)⁵² polishing shoes, which serves to make a distinction between her and anyone else who might clean shoes. Thus, the humility of the saint is underlined by the performance of a menial act, as the text reinscribes dominant social expectations.

Anglo-Saxon Female Saints in *South English Legendary*

The *vitae* of *Æthelthryth* of Ely, Eadburh of Nunnaminster and Mildrith of Thanet are found in the same three manuscripts, British Library MS Egerton 1993 (c. 1325-50), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS English Poetry a. 1 (Vernon, c. 1390) and Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 779 (fifteenth century), with Mildrith also appearing in Cardiff, National Library of Wales, 5043 (c. 1400).⁵³ They are not, however, a contiguous collection, but are placed in roughly chronological order of their feast days. Thus they are not a separately located group which can be added to or omitted from a collection with ease, but rather would need to be added individually, at the specific request of a potential reader.

Frideswide is found in more manuscripts, but she only appears along with *Æthelthryth*, Eadburh and Mildrith in Bodley 779, where she is placed between *Æthelthryth* and Eadburh, and all three are mentioned by Görlach as being placed in the wrong order. She is also to be found in the index of the Vernon manuscript, but missing in the text, and, like Mildrith, is present in Cardiff, NLW, 5043.⁵⁴

The inclusion of the *vitae* of *Æthelthryth*, Eadburh and Mildrith together in three manuscripts suggests that these manuscripts could have been intended for a female audience. Whether

⁵¹ Quotations for *Æthelthryth* are from the Vernon manuscript, fol 33r-33v. See Appendix A.

⁵² Quotations for Eadburh will refer to Braswell, 'Saint Edburga', *Life* at pp. 325-29.

⁵³ Dates from Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 75-77, 80-81, 102-104, 115-6. (Elene [Helen] and Winifrid are not included in this study as being respectively legendary and Welsh.)

⁵⁴ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 174-5, 196. For other manuscripts of Frideswide, see Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, p. 196.

the three were written at the request of a woman or women's community, or written to educate a women's community, either lay or monastic, the implication remains that Anglo-Saxon female saints were considered to be of interest to someone who would also be interested in a larger collection. The Anglo-Saxon female saints were important to someone on the same level as the universal saints, male and female.

Despite Turville-Petre's argument for a noticeable humility in the *South English Legendary*, the sense of Englishness in the Anglo-Saxon female *vitae* of this text is more clearly portrayed in the focus on the lineage of the women. One of the first things mentioned about each woman is that they *are* English, and are the daughters of kings:

Seint Ældrede of Heli god mayde was and hende.
Hire fader was kyng of Engelande of al þe Est ende. (Æthelthryth: ll. 1-2)

Seint Eadborw, þat holi maide, was her of engeland.
Þe King Edward hir fader was, as ich understoude. (Eadburh: ll. 1-2)

Seint Mildride þe holi mayde of kynges kunne com
Ibore heo was in Engelande, in þe vurst cristendom. (Mildrith: ll. 1-2)⁵⁵

However, beyond these first lines, the three women are given very different genealogies. Following the opening, Eadburh is given 26 lines of family history, with an enumeration of the 'vour Edwardes' which 'habbeþ þe kinges of þis lond [...] beo' (Eadburh: l. 3), and ending with 'Þe noble king þe ferþe was, þat com now late sine,/ Sir Edward þe noble man, þe kinges sone Henri.' (Eadburh: ll. 10-11). The first Edward listed is Eadburh's father, Alfred's son, the second is the son of King Edgar, and the third is Æthelred the Unready's son, Edward the Confessor. Thus connection is made, not only to King Alfred (who holds an important place in post-Conquest ideas of the pre-Conquest kingdom of England), but also to a martyr-saint and to the last real king before William (discounting Harold, whom the Normans had presented as being a usurper). Eadburh is placed within a historical England: not only that of her own period, but an England with a history that had continued down to the point of writing.

⁵⁵ Quotes for Mildrith from Paul Acker, 'Saint Mildred', pp. 140-153.

Braswell argues that this prologue to Eadburh's *vita* serves to provide more realism for the readers, thus distinguishing it from the universal *vitae* in the *South English Legendary* and from the sources and analogues for the text:

In combining an historical prologue with the saint's life the author achieves more than an exemplary legend of this type, however: he gives to spiritual biography historical verisimilitude and contemporary interest.⁵⁶

The first 55 lines of Mildrith's Life, as with Eadburh's, focus on her lineage, and particularly the conversion of her family to Christianity. It starts with the conversion of her great-grandfather, Eadbald, by Laurence, Archbishop of Canterbury after Saint Augustine. It then lists her grandfather, Eormenred, followed by her two uncles, Ethelbert and Ethelred, and her mother Domne Eafe. As Acker comments, '[t]hrough this genealogical prologue, the audience is brought back to the time in England which most corresponded to the time of martyrdoms and conversions in Rome'.⁵⁷ However, there is no mention in the *South English Legendary* version of Mildrith's *vita* of the martyrdoms of her uncles, who were also raised to sainthood, even though they are the usual focus of other Mildrith Legends.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the story of Domne Eafe's hind measuring out the land for the nunnery on Thanet is given in detail (Mildrith: ll. 38-54). That the focus should be entirely on the women in the story is unusual, and again suggests a female audience for the female *vitae*.

In contrast to Eadburh and Mildrith, Æthelthryth's family is not given in any great detail, despite her many holy sisters and nieces. Beyond the opening couplet, there is only one more line about her father: 'Kyng Anne, he was ihoten, riche mon i nouh' (Æthelthryth: l. 3). More mention is made of her two husbands, as also being royal:

þe Prince of þe Southhalf, heih mon of gret fame,
Weddede þis holy mayde: Tonbert was his name.

⁵⁶ Braswell, 'St Edburga', p. 312.

⁵⁷ Acker, 'Saint Mildred', p. 143.

⁵⁸ D. W. Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 9-11.

Saints and Englishness

To gedere heo weoren luytel while, ar þis mon to deþe drouh.
þis holy mayden was alyue, clene of hir self inouh,
So þat heo was i wedded seþþen, as hire fader bi say
To a noþur king of Engelonde, þat me clepeþ Egfrap. (*Æthelthryth*: ll. 5-10)

Having firmly placed the saints in history, with their royal fathers, the *South English Legendary* author also places them in their physical locations. *Æthelthryth* is mentioned as being from or belonging to Ely three times: *Seint Aeldrede of Heli* (l. 1); *In þe yle of Heli, nonne heo bi com* (l. 21); *Of hire me makeþ in Heli, gret feste a ger iwis* (l. 50).⁵⁹ Not only does this place her within the country, but it also gives her a present location, where her yearly feast is still held. Therefore the readers or listeners had a sense of her continuing presence in their own time.

Likewise, *Eadburh's vita* repeats the statement that she lived and died at Winchester (ll. 39, 100), and ends with the current locations of her relics:

So þat þe abbeiz of Pershore of Seint Eadborw is,
And þe nonnerie of Winchestre ek, þer heo was nonne iwis,
And Burcestre þer beside Oxneford þre canones beþ
Of Seint *Æd*borw hii beþ all þreo, as men al day seþ. (*Eadburh*: ll. 109-112)

As with *Æthelthryth's vita*, this information suggests the continuing presence of the saint, and gives readers locations they can journey to, to see these things for themselves.

Surprisingly, *Mildrith's vita* does not state her resting place. This is probably because Minster-in-Thamet had been destroyed by Danes, and so Mildrith's body had been translated to St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury and would not be found where she is mentioned in the text.⁶⁰ Apart from Mildrith, the *vitae* of the English saints in the *South English Legendary* serve as guides to the location of their relics, and thus provide a cultural map of England, as well as a guide for pilgrims.

⁵⁹ Though Bodely 779 has "*in holy chirche*".

⁶⁰ Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, p. 19.

That the three lives of Mildrith, Eadburh and Æthelthryth are found together in the same manuscripts, and not in others, suggests that perhaps these manuscripts were compiled with a different intention from most of the other extant manuscripts. Blanton argues that these three women are

presented as virgin daughters of Anglo-Saxon kings. [...] As representatives of East Anglia, Kent and Wessex, each demonstrates a regional history of England, and this may be the reason they are grouped together.⁶¹

However, this seems to be an over-simplification. As noted above, there is a great variation between the historical prologues to the three women's *vitae*, perhaps due in large part to the different kinds of sources available to the composer. But if the collection of Anglo-Saxon women was intended to 'demonstrate a regional history', it does not succeed. While Eadburh and Mildrith are indeed given histories, Eadburh's does not actually mention Wessex, Mildrith's starts in Northumberland and mentions Mercia (where her sister Milburh lies at Wenlock) before reaching Kent. Æthelthryth, on the other hand, is not given a historical prologue, though the fact that her father was king of the 'East end of England' is prominent in the first lines. To read them, then, as representatives of East Anglia, Kent and Wessex is to step back from the evidence of the text and to fill in the blanks with knowledge from elsewhere. The question then becomes whether the original audience would have had that other knowledge, or whether, as seems more likely, the *South English Legendary* was intended to provide the greater part of the information. Reading the Anglo-Saxon women as part of a general national impulse – rather than regional representatives – seems more reasonable, especially as Frideswide appears to have been meant to accompany Eadburh, Mildrith and Æthelthryth, which would then have doubled up the Wessex representatives.

I would suggest that these women were included specifically at the request of the original intended audience, and that they had some significance for a small group of people. The *South English Legendary* being what it was, there was every opportunity for a community (or three) to have their own versions of the *Legendary* copied especially for them, so that they

⁶¹ Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, pp. 240-241.

could specify who was to be included. If there was no version of a particular saint's *vita* yet in circulation, the mode of verse was such that one could be composed without too much trouble.

Görlach cautions against being too confident about locating an audience, stating that the 'medieval homes of the *SEL* MSS are practically unknown'.⁶² He is not encouraging about locating a nunnery as the intended audience of any extant manuscript, as

the addresses to the audience, the critical comments against priests and praise of the Mendicant orders [...] are hardly compatible with a collection meant for reading in a nunnery[.]⁶³

However, Görlach continues,

[t]he composite nature of the *SEL* renders an evaluation difficult: if the collection is considered to be by one author who used different sources, the objections carry their full weight. But if the liturgical layer of short legends formed the basis of the *SEL*, these texts could well have been used in a nunnery.⁶⁴

A. I. Doyle, after pointing out the great cost of producing a manuscript of the *South English Legendary* (approximately £65 - £85 in the fifteenth century), notes that there were two female houses – among the 'samples of the sort of appropriate destination' – which could be contenders for the Vernon manuscript:

Near Bordesly the only nunnery of any size was Westwood (Worc.), which had fourteen nuns in 1381, when it was still attached to the order of Fontevrault [...]. A much larger and wealthier house of the same order was Nuneaton (Warws.), with forty-six nuns in 1370 and a prior as late as 1424.⁶⁵

While the expense of such a manuscript may have been prohibitive to a single nunnery, Doyle suggests that the production and reading could have been shared by neighbouring religious houses, and prefers a religious audience rather than a lay one because 'the sheer

⁶² Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, p. 45.

⁶³ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, p. 48.

⁶⁴ Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, p. 48.

⁶⁵ A. I. Doyle, 'Introduction', in *The Vernon Manuscript: a Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. poet. A. 1.; with an introduction by Ian Doyle*, ed. by A. I. Doyle (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), pp. 14, 15.

quantity of reading matter argues for an audience or readership expected to have sufficient time and interest to benefit from more than occasional browsing in it'.⁶⁶

Wilton Chronicle

The *Wilton Chronicle*, on the other hand, was written for a particular audience, one with an intimate knowledge of Wilton and probably also of their saint, Edith. Despite this, the long historical prologues, found in both the *Wilton Chronicle* and the *Life of Etheldrede*, indicate a clear sense of a larger, more national outlook. Edith's family are part of the royal line continuing up to the time of writing, despite the Conquest. Æthelthryth's lineage is re-written to include her in the Wessex line, possibly as a result of the conquest of East Anglia by Wessex, so she, too, is given a place in the 'English' history.

Internal evidence dates the *Wilton Chronicle* to the reign of Henry V (1413-1422).⁶⁷ Henry is known for promoting local saints during his reign and is recorded as attributing his victory at Agincourt, in 1415, to the help of English saints. In her article, 'History, Historiography and Re-writing the Past', Katherine Lewis points out the benefits to the king of recognising the efficacy of English saints:

Being able to demonstrate that England was an outstandingly holy nation with a long tradition of saintly inhabitants was an important element in the formation and maintenance of English national prestige and showed evidence of divine favour.⁶⁸

Given the interest from the king in English saints, and the overall problem with finances experienced by Wilton at this time, it would have been an opportune time to renew interest in Wilton's very own royal saint. The close association of royalty with Wilton in the past offered an appropriate basis for the revival of Edith's cult, as would the sharing of Edith's feast day with Henry V's birthday on the sixteenth of September.

Henry V was also a prime mover in the development of the use of English as a legal language. Christopher Allmand says he enjoyed reading, and had books in Latin, French and English.

⁶⁶ Doyle, 'Introduction', pp. 14, 15.

⁶⁷ See William Henry Black, *Chronicon Vilodunense* (London, 1830), and Horstmann, *Wilton Chronicle*.

⁶⁸ Katherine J. Lewis, 'History, Historiography and Re-writing the Past', p. 129.

Along with his brother Humphrey, Henry actively encouraged the translation of great works such as *The Fall of Troy* and Boccaccio's poetry into English. Allmand goes on to say that '[t]he first surviving royal administrative document written in English is dated, significantly, 1410, when the Prince was at the centre of power; a second occurs in 1414, two more, including a set of minutes, in 1417'.⁶⁹ The rise of the number of saints' *vitae* translated into English over the course of the fifteenth century and the growth in the number of collections of specifically English saints are probably attributable, at least in part, to this new-found status of the English language.

Historicity in the *Wilton Chronicle*

Names, dates, places and royalty all feature prominently in the *Wilton Chronicle*. While the form is rhymed verse, the content is apparently well-researched, and presented in such a way that the historicity of it emerges as an integral part of the work. The *Wilton Chronicle* starts by telling about kings of Wessex from Egbert son of Alquimundy. The patent point of this introduction is that of institutional pride, describing the royal impetus behind the origin of the nunnery at Wilton, giving the convent a long and royal past.

A sense of national pride is easily found in the opening passage. We are given a date when Egbert was crowned, 'in þe ayzte hundreth zere saue on/ After þat Jhesu of Mary ded sprynge' (ll. 20-21), and a connection back from Egbert to the first Christian king of Wessex:

he was þe twolthe kyng þat in Westsex cristyndam nome
After Kyngylf, þat holy thyng,
þat by seynt Byryn crystyn be-come. (ll. 22-25).

The focus is on Wessex, but is soon widened to include the rest of the country, as Wessex expanded its borders. Once Egbert was crowned in Winchester (l. 26), a brief history of the kingdom is given:

Byfore his tyme in Bretayne þer were
Syxe kyngdomus more þen his;
Bot foure þis kyng knytte y-fere,

⁶⁹ Allmand, *Henry V*, p. 421.

Saints and Englishness

As in trewe story wryten hit is. (ll. 30-33).

The seven kingdoms are consolidated once Egbert has conquered Kent (ll. 34-37), Mercia (ll. 38-9) and Essex (ll. 40-41), and then a description of the name, and the people, of England is given:

And also by-fore his tyme y-wys
Pis lond was clepyt alle-hole Bretayne,
þat now Englund y-clept ys
For kyne Egberd þat name dede downe layne. (ll. 42-45).

Thus Wessex becomes the same area as England, and Egbert is credited with renaming Britain. There is no mention at this point in the text of where the name 'England' came from, and the text goes on to describe the inhabitants as being Britons, Irish, Scots, Picts, and Saxons, with Danes thrown in for good measure (ll. 46-53). The Saxons are given a further explanation:

From Saxsonye in Almayne þer comen y-wys
Thre maner of pepulle of one tonge:
Saxones, & Jutys, and Englysshe. (ll. 58-60).

There is no comment here on why it is that the king of the West Saxons adopted the name of one of the other 'people' from Saxony as the name for the land, but a fuller etymology is given in lines 86-109. The writer explains that Egbert commanded that all the Britons were to be called Welshmen, a 'sherte spekyng' (l. 97) of 'Cadwalla's men', while the Saxons were named after Hengist, as the leader who brought them into this land:

And þus Englonde toke first his name
in þe gode kyng Edbertys tyme,
Ryȝt as we clepe ȝet þe same
And herrafter shulde with-ouȝte lyme (ll. 106-109).

This passage clearly ties that action in the past with the present state as the author and audience would have experienced it, giving a sense of reality to the history being related.

An interesting feature of this text is the very anti-Norman sentiment it contains. As

mentioned above, William the Conqueror is labelled as a bastard, not only because he 'Come owt of Normandy in Fraunce' (l. 65) and beat the English at Hastings, but also because the author appears to have a strong sense of sympathy for the Saxons. William is described as having

slow kyng Haralde in þe batelle of Hastyngge,
And alle his ost he scomfytyd þere also;
And þo of alle Englonde he was y-cronyd kyng
And put þe Saxsones a-zen in to thraldam & wo. (ll. 66-69).

There is a moral explanation for the Norman action of conquering and enslaving the Saxons:

By-cause of here synne & of here foly –
For pryde, couetyse and lechery
God toke opon hem suche vengauce þus;
And falslyche to for-swere hem þey nere neuer wery –
Here owne kyng Haralde ʒaffe hom ensampulle of þis. (ll. 77-81).

It seems that the author is caught between two concepts of the Conquest. On the one hand, the Normans are cruel foreign masters, a picture possibly enhanced by the war Henry V was waging in France at the time. On the other hand, the author is probably a cleric of some sort and so argues that God is in control of such situations, in which case the English must have sinned in some way – to be deserving of such a punishment. Working with a range of sources, which are listed in the margins, the author is possibly influenced in his attitudes by some of the other chronicles.

King Alfred, who had been used by Goscelin and Osbert as an indication of a Golden Age, when Anglo-Saxon England was at its peak, is initially contrasted with his brother Æthelred, as a man of action where Æthelred is a man of prayer. In the battle at Ashdowne (AD 871), the brothers are to fight the Danes, led by Osegys, 'Forto aʒen-stonde all his malys/ and to kepe þat countre fro hem also' (ll. 268-9). Ethelred prepares by going to hear mass,

Bot Alured [Alfred] his brother was in þe felde
Monfullyche with alle his men,
Wel arayed with spere and shelde;

Þe mynstrals blwe hure trompus þen. (ll. 278-281).

The battle is described in great detail, with skirmishes and the 'twey hostes' (l. 283) moving back and forth, and repeatedly the 'Englysshemen' are under threat as they wait for their king to appear: they 'woxe a-gast/ and bygunne to falle alle hure chere' (ll. 284-5); they 'bygonne to fle,/ for þey were fulle sore a-gast' (ll. 292-3). Then King Ethelred, fresh from Mass, comes charging in:

He prekede in to þe felde þo fulle snelle
Among þe Denmerkys so kene,
And alle þat he met adoun he felle,
And slowe hem alle by-dene. (ll. 298-301).

There are striking similarities between this account and that of Norman Conquest as described in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, where the English are described as having lost because they spent the night before feasting and drinking, while the Normans spent it in prayer.⁷⁰

The *Chronicle* continues to describe the kings of Wessex and England and their interactions with the Danes, focusing especially on Alfred. The Danes are repeatedly represented as cruel and evil, besides being 'fulle fals and slze' (l. 381), while Alfred is a 'worthy thyng' (l. 417), and his son Edward a 'worthy knyzt' (l. 423). While the stated intent of this opening section, with the repeated lists of the founders from Egbert to Edgar, is so that the audience (probably the nuns of Wilton) 'mowe haue of hem knowynge þe more,/ In 3our preyours for hem þe rather to done' (ll. 688-9), the overall effect is one of great pride in the kings, along with the increased status that Wilton gained from these interactions. The text describes every king in Wessex with reference to what he did, or failed to do, for Wilton, along with other religious establishments. Thus, the *Wilton Chronicle* is a record of national history seen through the lens of one religious establishment. Overcoming the Danes and founding religious houses are placed on almost an equal footing as a measure of nobility.

⁷⁰ Malmesbury, *GRA*, III: 241-242, pp. 452-455.

The story of Saint Edith begins around line 786, when the *Wilton Chronicle* finally gives King Edgar a long introduction, presenting him as a holy king. According to this text (here based on Goscelin), Archbishop Dunstan's vision includes hearing an angel proclaiming peace to the English while Edgar lived:

Now may Englonde be glad and mery!
For rest and pese shalle þerinne be
By alle þis kyngys tyme y-wys,
And holy leuyng in prosperite;
God hathe þat childe y-graundyd þis. (ll. 805-9).

The king and the nation are closely tied together here. God grants peace to England through Edgar. Thus the kings of England are tied to the land, and closely associated with Wilton. The repeated use of 'England' and 'English' reinforces the continuation of the nation from Egbert down to the time of writing, and a history is provided which, while it is based around Wilton, considers wars and other events of national significance which happened in other places.

The *Life of Edith* proper, with which the *Wilton Chronicle* continues, is less blatantly focused on national pride, but there are still points at which such pride appears. Most noticeable is the expression of national pride found in the section which is designed to illustrate how humble Edith is. Dukes, earls and barons 'putten hem-self vnder here subiectione' (l. 1080), so that

All þe reme of Englond, bounde & fre,
Sayden þat he was worthy to bene a quene;
& quene of Fraunce he myȝte han be
Bot he nolde neuer consent to bene. (ll. 1081-4).

While this passage echoes Goscelin, Goscelin makes no mention of Edith being desired by the King of France, though both Gaul and Germany send her ambassadors.⁷¹ In the *Chronicle*, her beauty and her goodness are spread widely abroad, so that even the pope has heard of her, and sends her letters. The image here is not of an isolated island at the end of the world, but

⁷¹ Wright and Loncar, *Legend of Edith*, pp. 39-40.

of England being involved in the international politics of the day. Edith, on the other hand, 'toke none hedde' of 'worldelyche worshepe' (l. 1093).

Rather than dealing with ideas of England and Englishness, as was found in the history section of the *Wilton Chronicle*, the *Life of Edith* itself turns to the present existence of relics and miracles. While the author writes of telling about a miracle 'þe sothe as y fynd in story y-wryte' (l. 1266), the proof of the event lies in the relic left behind. As evidence of the unburnt clothes, the author says, the box is still to be seen:

Bot þis whyche þat nyȝe was þere brende,
In wisse of þe gret miracle þat þere was do
A lowe in to þe bouke of þe chirche was sende. (ll. 1361-3).

The existence of the box serves to connect the historically recorded past to the present, validating the miracle story, and thus lending credence to the other events recorded in *Edith's Life*. However, as this passage was translated almost straight from Goscelin, it is unclear as to whether the box is really available still be seen at the time of writing the *Wilton Chronicle*. There is a missing line at 1364, which may once have answered this question. Line 1365 assures us 'þat euery mon myȝt ryȝt welle see' the box, but the all important tense is in the missing line. Similarly, the mantle which was laid on Edith's tomb is presented as current evidence of the miracle in which a woman attempted to steal it, and was mystically fettered to the tomb until she repented (ll. 2269-2324).

The *Life of Edith* ends with a general description of many miracles occurring at Edith's tomb, and people making pilgrimages to Wilton for healing:

Thredtene ȝere continually forsothe þere were
Gret miracul at hurre tombe y-do,
& pilgrymys comen euere, bothe fer & nere;
& presoners ouȝt of presone weron lousede also.
& all þe reme had gret ioy y-wys
Of þis blessud virgyn, seynt Ede:
For what þat euer was done amys,
He wolde hem help, ȝyff þey hurre bede. (ll. 2365-2372).

The saint is presented as being a blessing to the whole realm, able to help all who pray to her. It is not clear here whether pilgrims are coming from foreign countries, but there is certainly movement within England to seek the aid of this national treasure.

The *Translation of Saint Edith* involves her brother, King Æthelred, in the act of raising Edith to further sainthood.⁷² Again, in the opening passages, Edith is linked to the King and to the realm of England, while she also forms a connection between earthly and heavenly people:

Bot by visyon sende hurre brother to,
Etheldrede, þat was kyng of Englonde þat stounde,
& by visyon badde hym to Wyltone go
& takon vp þat blessed body ouzt of þe grounde,
And sayde, þat body was worthy to haue grettore honour
Among vrthelyche peple in þis worde here,
Of þe whyche þe soule dwellythe vp in heuene-toure
Among þe virgyns & angelys so clere. (ll. 2399-2406).

The vision sends the king to Wilton, but the translation of the saint is depicted as something special not only for England, but also for all the people on Earth, because of Edith's existence both in heaven and in Wilton. The Duke of Cornwall, Ordulf, is involved in the translation, along with Dunstan, the archbishop of Canterbury, which emphasises the significance of such a ceremony for the whole country.

Historicity continues to be a concern for the author of the *Wilton Chronicle* through the miracle stories. He has rearranged the miracles into a chronological order, and has also added historical notes, in keeping with the chronicle-style of the earlier text. The author is apparently concerned to let the audience know when these miracles happened, possibly to illustrate Edith's care for people over the course of history.

Pis miracle was in þe day nexste after hurre translacyon ydo. (l. 2651).

In seynt Ede chirche of Wyltone þis miracle was done,

⁷² Horstmann, *Wilton Chronicle*, p. 54.

Trewelyche, as y 3ow telle,
þe secund 3ere of hurre translacione,
Wose wolle þe trewthe rede or spelle. (ll. 2847-50).

Thys myracle was do by-for seynt Ede
Of kyng Knowde þe nyentethe 3ere, y-wys. (ll. 3819-20).

The miracles are set in historical time, and the changes of kings are noted where they occur in the timeline. In part this is due to concern about the lands belonging to Wilton. The *Wilton Chronicle* is at pains to show or imply how each new regime confirmed or increased the lands belonging to Wilton. Cnut is shown great favour by Edith, and in return confirms her lands (ll. 3635-3650). William the Conqueror is not directly mentioned as having further confirmed the ownership of Wilton lands, but despite the earlier reference to 'Wyllyam Bastard' (l. 64), once he is installed as king, he is described as having held the lands in peace (l. 4444), as opposed to his son, William Rufus. However, even in Rufus' time, miracles occurred:

Bot in his tyme mo meracles weron 3et y-do
For þis blessud virgyn seynt Ede,
And mony men weron delyuerde ou3t of preson also
By þe grace of seynt Ede, as 3e mowe in story rede. (ll. 4447-50).

The focus on kings and their interaction with Edith serves to associate her not only with Wilton, but with the successive rulers of England, thereby trying to make her a nationally recognised, English saint.

The *Wilton Chronicle* appears to have been part of a programme to revive Wilton's flagging community and to interest the king and the people in Wilton's royal saint. The ending of the *Wilton Chronicle* gives some insight into the writer's intentions:

All þuse meracles god wrou3t for loue of seynt Ede
þe whiche y chaue y-wrytone in þis boke here;
And well mony mo þen y euer dude wryte or rede –
For thus weron wryton here-byfore CCC & fourty 3ere. (ll. 4967-70).

This refers directly to Goscelin of Saint-Bertin's record, on whose work the sections on Edith's *vita* and translation were based. After that time, the author of the *Chronicle* complains,

no-one recorded the miracles that happened, and now people no longer recognise when someone is punished by God, but explain it away as ‘mys-happe’:

For nomon nyl leue no meracle now;
 Bot when hit falluthe to ony mon for vengance amys,
 Pey seyn þat hit nys bot a mys-happe or a mys prowē;
 Bot þey nyl not say þat hit for vengance ys.
 Mony mon nylnot lerne forto do welle –
 Pey ben obstynatyde so meche in couetyse;
 Bot to here euelle y-spoke þey ben full snelle. (ll. 4975-4981).

Apparently, then, there were no further records of miracles happening at Wilton after Goscelin, beyond oral history which has been lost. The *Wilton Chronicle* author certainly adds no new miracles.

The *Life of Etheldrede*, like the *Chronicle*, opens with a detailed account of the seven kingdoms of Britain, and their kings, from the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons, through their unification by Egbert, king of Wessex, up to the Norman Conquest.⁷³ What is most intriguing here is how the East Anglian history is rewritten to tie it in to that of Wessex. The first hundred lines of the *Life of Etheldrede* describe the position and origin of each of the seven kingdoms. Wessex alone ‘nas neuer 3et y-wonne y-wys,/ Till Willyham Conquerour þis lond come to’ (ll. 42-3), and the other kingdoms are ‘knytte’ to it over time. The seven kingdoms are also given specific geographical boundaries, such as that of East Anglia:

Bot þe seuethe kyndam of Estenglonde was y-wys,
 þe whiche conteynede Northfolk & Sowthefolk botwo.
 þe whiche hathe on þe est-syde & on þe north-syde, as hit ywriton is,
 þe see o compas euene, Cambrygeshire to,
 & on þe westsyde Edmundus-borwe forsothe hit is,
 & on þe sowthesyde Hertfordeshire & Essex also. (ll. 93-98).

Following Trevisa’s translation of the *Polychronicon*, this detailed description of the borders of East Anglia, with which some of the other kingdoms are also provided, shows an awareness of the physical geography of England, another aspect which does not easily agree

⁷³ Horstmann, *Wilton Chronicle*, pp. 282-307.

with a text written entirely for nuns. While the *Wilton Chronicle* and the *Life of Etheldrede* are addressed to, or appear to be written for, the nuns of Wilton, the texts show a greater concern for both the history and geography of England than that found in Goscelin's work, as shown by the careful placing of the miracles in their historical context. This concern, along with the focus on kings and dates, suggests the writer's consciousness of a wider audience than the nuns.

The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres

The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres (CUL, MS Add. 2604) contains translations of some *vitae* from the *Nova Legenda Anglie*, or more probably Tynemouth's original, alongside lives of more universal saints. In this manuscript, however, there has been a very particular choice made: the *vitae* from the *Nova Legenda Anglie* are all female, and, with one exception, all from England. In particular, there is a focus on the saints of Ely, or rather the offspring of King Anna: Æthelthryth, Seaxburh, Eormenhild, Werburh, Wihtburh and Eorcongota. The other English saints are Edith of Wilton, Eadburh of Thanet, Eanswith of Folkestone, and Hild of Whitby. Modwenna of Ireland, a fifth-century saintly abbess veiled by St Patrick himself, does appear to upset the argument that the *English* female saints are an important part of the make-up of this manuscript, but her *vita* seems to be a later addition starting on a new page in a new pen (though probably the same scribe) and lacking the foliage which surrounds the openings of the earlier saints in the manuscript.

No Anglo-Saxon male saints are included, and the other female saints are also an interesting selection. They are either martyrs, such as Columba of Sens or Domitilla, or they are virgins, who were tortured because of their faith or their refusal to wed non-Christians, or both.

Thus, Agatha was tortured because she refused to marry a non-Christian, while Cecilia was married to a pagan, and converted him to virginity. These are all early church saints, from the Mediterranean, whose historicity is now questioned, but who were popular in the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman periods, largely because of their examples of chastity and devout self-denial. Agatha, Cecilia and Barbara, especially, are often held up as models of true faith,

and particularly put forward as patterns for virgins to follow.⁷⁴

English Identity in *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*

Despite the inclusion of the universal saints, English identity is constructed in this text in a number of ways. The first and most obvious is in the selection of saints. Whether or not *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres* was intended for a female audience, the large proportion of Anglo-Saxon female saints stands out. While the universal saints were good examples of holy living, the English saints were illustrations that this holy living was not something unattainable, available only to those who lived far away and long ago, but was also possible in England in the not-too-distant past.

As in the case of the *South English Legendary*, each of the English saints in this text is clearly labelled as being English or related to English royalty in the opening of her *vita*. The first English saint is with Æthelthryth, here given her Norman name of Audrey, and the text relates both her and Seaxburh to their father, King Anna. From that point, all the other daughters and granddaughters of Anna are related to one another. Eadburh and Eanswith are daughters of successive kings of Kent, while Edith is the daughter, simply, of King Edgar; there is no mention of his being king of England.

Another indication of pride in the Englishness of the saints is provided by the multiple references to relics and places which exist 'yit in to this day' (fol. 54r).⁷⁵ These saints were not foreigners who existed long ago and far away, but rather were people who had inhabited the same landscape as the audience: the effects of their lives were still visible, accessible, to the readers or listeners. Æthelthryth's *vita* mentions the well which sprang up when she was thirsty, and the oak that grew from her staff, both while she was escaping from Ecgfrith:

and anon a well of fressh swete watir sprange vp at hir fete wherof all they were relevid of their thrist and thankid god. And yit in to this day the same well is ther and callid seynt Awdryes well. [...] And with in processe of tyme it grewe in to a grete

⁷⁴ Reames, *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*. References are given to the folio number. See Appendix B for my transcriptions of the *vitae* of Audrey and Edith.

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hoke. Therefore evir aftir that place was and is called awres is stowe, that is for to say Awdre is resting place, and is nowe made ther a fayre chapell in the worship of seynt Awdre. (fols 54r-54v).

Saint Audrey's Well and Saint Audrey's Stowe were both contemporary, visible places with direct connections to the saint, as neither would have existed without the events related in the Life. Thus the saint is at once made into a marvel – through her miracles – and made more accessible, as one could still drink from her well, or worship at the chapel. Likewise there are holy items to view when visiting Ely: the hole in her tomb made by the Dane, 'which hole is sene vnto this day' (fol. 56v); and 'the same bondes of yrin hangyn at hely' (fol. 57v) which Æthelthryth loosed from a repentant usurer.

Eanswith also left evidence of her presence in the form of a well. Her oratory lacked water, so she dragged her staff from the nearest stream:

This holy mayde... went thens a myle from the oratory and out of a well broȝt watir, which folowed by touching of hir staffis ende out from þe valey vnto þe toppe of þe hill ayenst kynde, which into this day is grete comforth bothe to men and bestis. (fol. 80v).

In contrast, Wihtburh had left a well, but it was subsequently destroyed:

And out of that place ther she was first beryed, sprange vp a well of full fayre watir and clere, yeving helth to many seke folke, but aftirwarde, by the tempest of batayle in the Danes tyme, the same monastery was destroyed and nonnes fled a way and nowe it is but a parissh chirch. (fol. 68r).

While there is still a connection between the church and Wihtburh, the well and the miracles seem to have been lost. Wihtburh's body was removed to Ely to be with her other sisters.⁷⁶ Thus, as with the *South English Legendary*, there is a connection between the recording of the English saints and the locations of their shrines, relics, and other geographical connections.

The connection between the English saints and the arrival of Christianity is another important part in the construction of national identity. Seaxburh converted her husband,

⁷⁶ See *LE*, II: 53, pp. 145-48.

king Eorconbert, and persuaded him to rid his realm of idols:

The kyng by hir holy stirringes first destroyed in his reme all mawnimentrye which was left vndestroyed by oper kynges dayes afore him, so that he encreased not only Cristes kyngdome in erth, but rather made all his kyngdome Cristes kyngdome. By hir stirring also, he encreased monasteries in his reme and made many chirches. He was the first also that commaundid lenton to be kept in abstinence from flessch in all his reme. (fol. 60r).

Her daughter, Eormenhild, was likewise instrumental in converting her husband and a kingdom:

This holy woman was at last weddid to kyng Wolfere, which euer aftir lyved an holy life and made pees betwene diuerse kynges in this reme, and brought hir husbonde to cristendome which was a fore an hethen kyng. And evir hir holy besines was for to excite the comune peple [61v] and the rude peple to take vpon hem the swete yok of Criste by holy bapteme. (fols 61r-61v)

Eormenhild's actions in making peace between kings hark back to a much older Anglo-Saxon idea of the queen as peace-weaver. However, when the warring kings were heathen or Danes, or both, there was no peace to be had. Werburh's body suffered at the arrival of the Danes, but not because they were able to touch it:

That same holy body lay so incorrupte vnto the comyng of the Danes which destroyed many an abbey in this londe for synne. And our lorde therfore wold not that suche paynemes, that beleved not on no seynt, shulde se that body but suffred it to turne into powder. Hir bones were aftirward translaid from thens in to the monastery of chester. And ther they rest vnto this day where many miracles ben shewed to the worship of god and encrease of virtue. (fol. 65r)

Once again, there is a tension between the saint and the Danes who have been sent by God as a punishment. Their invasions may have been sanctioned, but they are still heathen, and therefore not allowed to touch the saint.

The final topic found in *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres* which has bearing on English identity is that of language. As there is no prologue, the fact that *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres* was written in English is discussed anywhere in the text. However, the subject of

the vernacular is touched on in the story of Hild and Cædmon. There is no mention here, as there is in Bede, of Cædmon being the first to compose religious verse in English, but the song is paraphrased thus:

The sentens of it was this: 'Nowe we shull prayse our maker of heven and of erth, his myght, his wysdome and his goodnes. For he beyng endles god, is auctor and maker of hevyn and of all mervelous workis, which is the blessid keper of all mankynde.'

This is the vnderstanding of tho verse; not worde by worde as he sange it, but only the sentens. For ther can no ditee be translated worde by worde as it is made from o tonge an othir with out hurting of the feyrnes [fairness] of it.

The consciousness displayed of the problems of translation is found first in Bede's Latin *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and is then carried over to the *Nova Legenda Anglie*, which leaves Cædmon's song in an interesting position.⁷⁷ It has been translated from Old English to Latin, and back into English, but the English is now so changed that, even had the translator of *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres* had the original on hand, it would have needed translating for the fifteenth-century audience. Yet there is no reference to what the original language was in this version of the episode.

Just what impulse lay behind the compilation of *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres* is hard to see exactly. The selection of saints indicates that there was some aim to collect Anglo-Saxon female saints, though the combination of well-documented national saints with some of the more dubious universal saints might suggest that the roles of virgin abbess or Christian wife were more important to the compiler or audience than their origin.⁷⁸ However, the lack of Welsh or Irish female saints in the collection, when they were present in the *Nova Legenda Anglie*, points to a more deliberately English consciousness of the role of English saints. Also, the greater number of Anglo-Saxon female saints (eleven to eight universal female saints) does imply that these women were considered, by the compiler, to be significant topics for reading.

⁷⁷ Bede, *HE*, iv: 24, pp. 414-7.

⁷⁸ See, also, Blanton, 'Literary Production and Nunneries in East Anglia'.

Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande

Görlach comments in the introduction to his edition of the 1516 *Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande* that 'local and national pride may have played a part' in the production of this 'encyclopaedia'.⁷⁹ The *Kalendre* is closely associated with the *Nova Legenda Anglie* but, as Görlach points out, there are some discrepancies between the texts (similar to those found in *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*). Görlach states that

the *Kalendre* compiler must have used some additional information from outside the *NLA*, but the material added is not specific enough to permit us to establish his auxiliary sources.⁸⁰

National pride is a key component for such a work, as it was with in the compilation of *The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*. All the saints in the *Kalendre* are British, or were active in Britain at some time. Of the 168 saints, 57% are English, as opposed to Welsh, Irish, or Scottish and 32 of the saints (19%) are female.

The English female saints are the same as those in the *Nova Legenda Anglie*, but the texts of the *vitae* themselves provide little in relation to England or national identity, beyond placing the saints in a time and place, often in relation to other royal kinfolk.⁸¹ The most visible nationalism (which it can be called here, owing to the very deliberate presentation) is all in the prologue.

This prologue, 'largely independent of the Latin source,'⁸² explains quite clearly the purpose of the text:

The firste treatyce of this present boke is taken out of the Newe Legende of the Sayntys of Englande, Irelande, Scotlande and Wales for theym that vnderstande not

⁷⁹ Görlach, *Kalendre*, p. 7.

⁸⁰ Görlach, *Kalendre*, pp. 12-16.

⁸¹ They are: Cuthburh, Eanswith, Ebba, Eadburh (great-grandmother to Mildrith), **Edith** of Wilton, **Ælflæd** (Romsey), Eormenhild, **Æthelburh** (Barking), **Æthelthryth** (Ely), Frideswide, Hild, **Hildelith** (Barking), Juthwara, Cyneburh and Cyneswith, Milburh, Mildrith, Modwenna, Osyth, Seaxburh, Walburh (missionary to the Continent), Werburh, Wihtburh, **Wulfhild** (Barking). Those bolded are the saints of particular interest to this study.

⁸² Görlach, *Kalendre*, p. 11.

the Laten tonge, that they atte theyr pleasure may be occupyed therwith and be therby þe more apte to lerne the resydue when they shall here the hole legende.⁸³

The translator is evidently expecting an audience with leisure to read, but not the education to read Latin. He is not intending to provide them with an exhaustive well of information, but rather whetting their appetites so that they will be 'more apte to lerne the resydue'. As Görlach suggests, it is 'tempting to connect the factual style [...] with a bourgeois readership eager for information but incapable of getting it from Latin texts.'⁸⁴

Concern for the education of the Latin illiterate is further seen in the comments on people's ignorance of the saints, so that 'þe oonly herynge of theyr names wyll be a lernynge to most men'.⁸⁵ That the common people have not heard of many of these saints suggests that some of the saints included in the *Kalendre* were not liturgically celebrated outside of their own region. Thus, bringing all the saints together into one collection will broaden the consciousness of the audience the wide range of English saints. The writer notes that these blessed men and women have done many things for the 'comen welthe' of the people, and so should be remembered. The saints are presented as useful, both now and in the life to come.

The prologue expresses a further anxiety over the lack of a local patron saint of England. The people of Ireland have Saint Patrick, the people of Scotland Saint Nynian (or Tronyon), and the people of Wales David, all saints who have worked to bring the gospel to the nation and have been active in preaching and teaching,⁸⁶

But in this realme of Englonde, whatsoeuer is the occasyon, fewe people in comparyson of the multytude haue deuocyon to any of thyse blessyd seyntes that haue laboured for the welthe of the people in this realme in tyme paste or that haue them in honoure as other countreys haue other seyntes in lyke case.⁸⁷

So, although he is translating all the saints, British and English, the writer is concerned

⁸³ Görlach, *Kalendre*, p. 43.

⁸⁴ Görlach, *Kalendre*, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Görlach, *Kalendre*, p. 44.

⁸⁶ Görlach, *Kalendre*, pp. 44-5.

⁸⁷ Görlach, *Kalendre*, p. 45.

particularly with the apparent lack of a local English saint, and the lack of reverence for those saints of England who likewise 'laboured for the welthe of the people'. This is not to say that the English should abandon their patron, Saint George, but

neuerthesse if they also honoure theyse gloryous seyntes þat haue laboured in this countrey for þe helthe of þe people, as is aforesayde, they shall therby ryght hyghly please theyr patron Seynt George.⁸⁸

The concern here appears to be similar to that found in other countries (particularly colonial powers) with large minority groups. The ruling group is treated as not having a culture, while the minorities are seen to maintain theirs as a form of rebellion. In this text, the ruling nation has the last say in the matter, though:

consyderynge also that the most parte of tho sayntes that be in the sayd legende & in this kalender were eyther borne in this realme or were abydyng therin & that thesye other countreys, Irelande, Scotlande and Wales, of veray ryght owe to be subiecte & obedyent to this realme of Englonde as it semyth, this lytyll treatyce maye conueniently be callyd the Kalender of the Newe Legende of Englonde.⁸⁹

While the saints of 'thesye other countreys' are included in the text, they are written out of the title, owing to their supposed subjugation to England. This, as Görlach points out, is 'an interesting historical statement for 1516', when Scotland and Ireland were attempting to exercise their independence from England.⁹⁰

Englishness in Collections

While the collections of Anglo-Saxon female saints' *vitae* written after the thirteenth century were not intended to produce a sense of Englishness, the works do display an increasing awareness of English identity, and a growing interest in collections of English saints. They are the results of an underlying sense of national or English pride.⁹¹ At this point, the idea of Englishness has become so entrenched in the culture that compilers could create collections of English saints' *vitae* without having to provide an excuse, as in the case of the *Lyoes and*

⁸⁸ Görlach, *Kalendre*, pp. 45-6.

⁸⁹ Görlach, *Kalendre*, p. 46.

⁹⁰ Görlach, *Kalendre*, p. 10.

⁹¹ See, for example, Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

Saints and Englishness

Dethes of the Martyres. On the other hand, some compilers, such as the translator of the *Kalendre*, were so driven by concern at the lack of awareness by English people of English saints, in contrast to the Scottish and Welsh national saints, that their prologues were full of explicit appeals to a sense of Englishness.

The same indicators of national consciousness are found in female saints' *vitae* as those found in the male *vitae*. There is an emphasis on the historicity of the saints, the recording of their dates and their relationships to various royal families. The continued presence of the saints is also documented, describing both the places where the saints have been, the wells and trees which are the direct result of saints' miracles, and the sites where the saints now rest. Collections of exclusively English or British saints display a concern for local or English identity, and pride in what 'our people' can do.

What is noticeable, however, is that despite the similarities of Englishness displayed in the *vitae* of both male and female English saints, the female saints are only given this role when they appear in their own collections, or in collections of British and English saints. In mixed collections of universal and national saints, the *vitae* of the women are frequently omitted in subsequent renditions of the texts. At the same time, there is an increase in the collections of female saints, and more specifically of English female saints. As it is probable that these collections of female saints were compiled for and read by women, it follows that religious and lay women from the fourteenth century onwards were becoming as aware of their national heritage and as interested in local tales as were their male countrymen.

Conclusion:

Rereading Anglo-Saxon Female Saints in Post-Conquest England

*At midniȝt þis holy maide in þis erber com gon,
Al barfot in þe colde dewe – colde weren hire ton.
(Eadburh, *South English Legendary*, ll. 81-82)*

The author of the *South English Legendary's* Life of Eadburh illustrates in these lines the individual and physical character of the saint, one of the many layers of identity which can be found in a saint's *vita*. Eadburh's dew-drenched feet flashing over the grass lend no extra weight to her saintliness, serving instead to emphasise her humanity and make her more visible to the eye of imagination. As can be seen in this tale, readers of Anglo-Saxon female saints' *vitae* have to negotiate multiple layers of identity. Some of the identities complement each other, while others compete for the attention of the audience. In rereading the *vitae*, this study discussed the identity of the saint, how the divergent audiences of commissioned *vitae* affected the authors' depiction of that identity, and served to raise awareness of the role which the Anglo-Saxon female saints' *vitae*, the hagiographers, the commissioners, and their audiences may have played in disseminating a sense of Englishness among the female population of England.

In her article, 'Beyond Positivism and Genre', Felice Lifshitz warns that

the fact that 'hagiographical' narratives (both original and revised versions) have frequently been stigmatized as 'untrue' can still blind us to their function as historical *writing*, despite their increasingly enthusiastic rehabilitation as historical *sources*.¹

She points out that assigning a genre to most writing in the medieval period is anachronistic and suggests instead that historians re-examine texts which have traditionally been labelled 'hagiographical'.² Taking into account the 'changing political contexts' of the *vitae* and their

¹ Lifshitz, 'Beyond Positivism', p. 95. Her italics.

² Lifshitz, 'Beyond Positivism', pp. 102, 113.

rewritings,³ this study has read the works as the writings of their periods, focusing on the creation and reiteration of identity in concentric layers. Biographies of saints were a popular source of historical reading and, as the number and spread of such texts as the *South English Legendary* indicate, were widely available even before the printing of the *Nova Legenda Anglie* and the *Kalendre*. Therefore, in discussing concepts of historical significance found in these texts, it is important to read and consider the role of the women along with that of the men.

Robert Rouse has shown that 'the idea of Anglo-Saxon England held a significant place in the literary and social imagination of the post-conquest English'.⁴ He pointed out that, while the central authors of the Middle English canon (such as Chaucer, Gower, and Langland) do not pay much attention to Anglo-Saxon England, the more popular texts reveal an 'enduring literary interest in the Anglo-Saxon past'.⁵ The texts Rouse studied, the *Proverbs of Alfred* (1150 x 1165) and the Matter of England Romances (*Guy of Warwick, Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild, Beues of Hamtoun, Sir Orfeo, Havelok the Dane*) are all focused around male protagonists. One of the few places where women are central to narratives is in the *vitae* of the female saints.

Anglo-Saxon saints' *vitae* have been read as historical sources for attitudes to women, religious or otherwise, and for information on religious institutions. The information thus gleaned from them, however, must be treated with caution. While some insight into the running of the houses of women religious can be gained, it is vital to be aware of the contexts within which these *vitae* were written. Stephanie Hollis has suggested that

the writing of female saints' lives constituted an unprecedented literary foregrounding of women, for the narrative marginalisation of monastic women in Bede's *History* is paralleled in epic form by *Beowulf*.⁶

Bede's work, as with any hagiographer's, is 'an artifact of his own bias [and] does not [...]

³ Lifshitz, 'Beyond Positivism', p. 97.

⁴ Robert Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), p. 157.

⁵ Rouse, *Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 157.

⁶ Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), p. 246.

serve to reveal the actual position of women'.⁷ However, through the idealised depictions of saints and their communities, we can catch glimpses of women and their roles in religious communities through the texts. Every saint's *vita* was filtered through the lens of the author's individual attitude towards women, Anglo-Saxons, and saints. At the same time, the hagiographers were also acutely aware of the contemporary opinions both of their intended audiences and of the wider population who would also be exposed to their works. Chapter II showed how the identity of the saint was repeatedly rewritten to fit her into a society which had moved on from Anglo-Saxon times. While all the texts examined in this study were careful to locate the saints in their proper place in Anglo-Saxon history, they were also affected by attitudes to women and to saints at the time of their writing. The hagiographers who were commissioned by a community needed to balance the historical person of the saint which was retained in the living memory of the community with an idealised holy person who would be acceptable to Norman churchmen, on whom the hagiographers depended for future work. Later writers, or hagiographers working on older saints, were able to rewrite the person into a pattern more recognisable as a saint. While they still had to account for surviving relics, they were also able to provide a holy gloss on the saint's actions which the community could no longer refute.

Chapter III focused on the hagiographers' considerations of audience expectations, and how the communities were involved in the production and reiteration of their saints. Such considerations led Goscelin of Saint-Bertin to edit his *vita* of Edith of Wilton, so that the version which he dedicated to Archbishop Lanfranc (*d.* 1089) was quite different from that which he intended for the nunnery at Wilton. While many of the episodes included were the same, the hagiographer depicted the saint as reading female saints' *vitae*, rather than that of St Denis, in the manuscript which contains the dedication to the archbishop. There was also more of a focus on her holy acts, and less on the events surrounding the relics which Wilton owned. The existence of these two editions illustrates the impact of the audience on the writing of a *vita*, contrasting the more rigid expectations of the prelate with the necessity to account for the human person whom the community remembered. These two manuscripts

⁷ Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 243.

Rereading Anglo-Saxon Female Saints

therefore serve as a warning about reading other texts, and the importance of considering the intended audience in the interpretation of attitudes to saints or women. Similar cautions are indicated by the change in the saint over time and distance. As *vitae* were rewritten, the outcomes of some miracles were made less severe, and the saint also gained a voice as she moved further from the time and place of the historical person, thus further reworking, and at times reinventing, her identity.

Part B's introduction engaged with a range of scholarship on the vexing topic of whether there was a medieval national identity. From the depictions of Anglo-Saxon, Norman and English in the chronicles, it has been shown that there was indeed a sense of imagined community in much the same way that Benedict Anderson has described in his book, and for much the same reasons: a people group associating themselves with each other, despite different backgrounds, and identifying themselves against outsiders.

Chapter IV, then, focused its study on the effect and depiction of the growth of, if not a national identity, then certainly an English one. Taking first the example provided by the chroniclers of England in the first century or so after the Conquest, I expanded on the argument for a sense of Englishness which was started in the introduction to Part B. The chapter explored the different methods by which the chroniclers described Englishness in the Anglo-Saxon period. This was then applied to the works of the hagiographers, examining how they depicted the role of kings, the Golden Age of the English church, and the threats of outsiders. The texts focused on in this chapter were again the commissioned *vitae*, as the texts which had been written closest to the Conquest. The Conquest, which has subsequently been considered by historians and literary scholars as a major break in the history of England, was shown to be elided in these earlier texts. Where the new rulers were mentioned, they were presented as the natural heirs to the Anglo-Saxon kings, which was a good political move when dedicating such *vitae* to prelates installed by the new Norman regime.

This attitude of continuity was dramatically changed in the later texts, written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. William the Conqueror was described as 'Wyllyam

Bastard', and the Normans were depicted as cruel oppressors.⁸ During the Hundred Years War (1340-1453), the French were vilified in English texts, and the Anglo-Normans had become English enough that the Normans from the Conquest period were closely associated with the French. It was during this time, too, that collections of saints' *vitae* became popular as ecclesiastical texts. English saints, both Anglo-Saxon and post-Conquest English, made their presence felt in many of these collections, and female saints were a part of this development. However, as Chapter V noted, the Anglo-Saxon female saints were better represented in collections of English or British saints, and tended to disappear from more universal collections, even those compiled in England. The reason for this is unclear, but it may be indicative of some form of inequality between saints of different genders, that the Anglo-Saxon female saints were not seen to be worthy of standing alongside the universal saints (such as Cecilia, Barbara, and Ursula) with their more widely-spread legends. However, as was shown by the *Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*, in collections of predominantly female *vitae*, the Anglo-Saxon women were presented as equals with the more popular Continental saints. They were also well represented in collections of English or British saints, causing their absence in larger groupings to seem an unintentional oversight, possibly as the result of misogynist tendencies – although there is no direct evidence for this.

While the absence of Anglo-Saxon female saints from thirteenth to fifteenth-century collections may have been an unintentional oversight, or may be blamed on unequal gender representations, their absence from more recent discussions of the roles played by saints in the development of a sense of English identity is less justifiable. The lack of edited manuscripts, while being implicated in this omission, is one cause which is gradually being removed. As more published texts from this period become available, the range of topics for study will be greatly improved, giving us a better insight into the roles and experiences of women. By looking at the texts which women were reading, we can come to a greater understanding of the expectations of their society on their actions and through the texts on female saints in particular we can see something of the life of communities of women, even when the nunneries might not otherwise be very well documented.

⁸ Horstmann, *Wilton Chronicle*, ll. 64-80.

Rereading Anglo-Saxon Female Saints

This thesis has demonstrated some of the wide variety of ways in which the *vitae*, the hagiographies which are often considered to be unhistorical, can be investigated. In looking at the layers of identity which were built up around an Anglo-Saxon female saint, from the depiction of the saint as a person, to the interaction between the saint and her community in the retelling of her *vita*, information on topics from gender roles, to women's literacy, to the efficacy of medicine have been seen. The importance of its land to a nunnery, and ways in which the nunnery might try to revive its fortunes can be found in hagiographies. These works can also provide information on the attitudes to historical and holy figures, and show how these attitudes alter over time. The rewritten *vitae* also reveal the change in the concerns of communities, both the religious houses which contained the relics of the saints and the wider community of readers. Women were readers and consumers, not only of the identity of saints, but also of a sense of Englishness. Rereading the texts they read can broaden our understanding of their lives and attitudes.

Appendix A

On hire lord heo criede faste 3if heo mihte come to ende
In to þe ordre of Nonnerie he grauntede hire to wende,
Ac þe kyng wel longe hit wiþseide, and loþ hi was þerto.
20 Atte laste he grauntede hit þo, he ne miht non oþer do.
In þe Yle of Heli, Nonne heo bi-com
Of þe Bisschop Wilfran þat was þo þe Abite heo nom.
ffor hire þat hous was furst bi-gonne, þis ordre forte make
So þat a gret couent sone heo gon to hire take.
25 An Abbesse heo was hire-self ymad after þe furste 3eere,
And an holy couent i nouh heo norischede þere.
Clannore lyf ne miht beo þen seint Aldreþ gon lede,
Of ffastinge, and of orisons, and of Almes dede.
Of suche goodnesse and holinesse hire folewede i nouh,
30 Atte laste as God hit wolde, toward hire ende heo drouh.
Wel longe bi fore hire deþ, as hire sustren i sege,
Heo seide whonne heo schulde heoune and whonne heo schulde dye.
And whuche of hire sustren schulde wiþ hire hennes wende, fol.33v
And riht as heo hedde i seid, hire lyf heo brouhte to ende.
35 Wiþ gret honour as riht was, in eorþe heo was ibrouht.
Ur lord haþ for hire loue, feir miracle iwrouht.
Sixtene 3er, þis holy maide in eorþe lay so
Ar heo weore vp i-nome, and in schrine ido.
So þat Sexborwh hire sostur was Abbesse in a day,
40 Aftur hire in þulke house, þer hire bodi lay.
Þo þis bodi sixtene ger in eorþe hedde i-leye so,
Þe abbesse hire suster nom hit vp, and let hit in schrine do.
Hire bode heo fond also feir as heo alyue were,
Cleer and round, and feir inouh, riht as heo a-slepe were þere.
45 Also fareþ þis wyues 3ut, þat maydens comeþ to deþe
And so longe mid heore lordes beþ, as ich wene heo mowe wel eþe

Appendix A

Þe scheten þat heo inne was i-wounde, as swote weoren also

And as white as heo weore, þo heo was in heom ido.

Of hire < >³ makeþ in Heli. gret feste a 3er i-wis

50 Praye⁴ God for þe loue of hire, bring us to heuene blis. A.M.E.N

³ < > MS illegible.

⁴ Praye | P<e.

Appendix B

Edith and Æthelthryth in the *Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*

Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 2604, was written in the second half of the fifteenth century. It is vellum, 120 folios, bound together with 31 mounted leaves of a sixteenth century writing master's book before, and 29 folios after, containing seventeenth century texts about St Christopher and St Benedict.

The text of the main manuscript is written on ruled lines (varying from 25 to 30 per page) in a neat, slightly sloping secretary hand. Blue capitals are flourished with red, and gold initials on grounds of blue and salmon pink, and further flourished with foliage down the side of the page, with gold, green and blue. Some of the gold on the main initials has been scraped off, blurring the letter. On 1, each word of the title, 'The Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres' is separately mounted on a vellum piece. The initial 't' has been separately coloured in the late eighteenth century.

The texts of Audrey (Æthelthryth) (fols 52v-59r) and Edith (69v-75v) are presented here with silent expansions, modern punctuation, and with textual errors noted. The catch-words at the bottom of every verso have been ignored, except where the following page is missing.

[fol.52v] The life of Seynt Audry of Hely

**Of Sent Audre, howe she was weddid to twayn hosbondes, on aftir an other, and
allway she was a mayde and aftirward made none.**

The blessid virgyn Seynt Awdre was the doughter of kyng Anne that was kyng of Estenglonde which had foure daughters. On was clepid Sexburgh, an other Albugh, the third Awdre and þe fourth¹ Witburgh. This mayden Seynt Awdre, whan she unmete age

¹ fourth] fourt.

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was, weddid ayenst hir [fol.53r] will to a kyng and prince of the yle of Hely, whos name was callid Tonberte. It happid aftir tyme Seynt Awdrie was weddid, at evyn the same day, she went to hir chaumbre onely for to pray. That herd hir husbonde Tonberte, and sent hir worde that he wolde come to hir anone. Than Seynt Awdrye was passing sorry, dreding gretly for to be deceyved of hir holy purpose, and therwith she wept and prayed deuoutly to God, that hir chastite myght be kept clene to him. As she prayed, he come and lokid in prevely in to hir chambir for to se whatshe did. And with that, him thought he sigh the hous ther she knelidall in a fyre. Whan he had seyn that, he with drewe him and cryed to hir, "And, goode woman, thenk it not that I will make you lese your chastite, I pray you thenke it not, for I wott well nowe God is your protectour and helper and defender ayenst me and ayenst all men".

It was not longe aftir but that hir husbonde, the same Tonbert dyed and than eft-sones she was weddid to Egfryde of Northumberlande by avise of all hir frendes, with whom she lyved twelve yere weddid and he loved hir not only as his wyfe, but as his lady and worshiped hir for hir holy lyving. Yit neuer the lesse he felt oft times stirrynges for to take hir as his wyfe, but he durst not for fere of God. So that in a tyme, he prayed Seynt Wilfryde, the Erchbisshop of Yorke, whom Seynt [fol. 53v] Awdre lovyd right gostly as hir gostly fadir and confessour, that he wolde bowe hir will for to concent to him as a wyfe shulde do to hir husbonde, for he wyst well that she loved no man so well, ne he loved no mayden so gostly well as eche of hem did other. This holy man Seynt Wylfryde seyde that he wolde do what he cowthe, but evir he counceyled hir for to kepe hir chastite, and seid that for trewe keping therof she shulde haue a gret rewarde and mede in heven. At the last, with gret menes made the kyng consent that she shulde be made a nonne, and was so. In the monastery of Coldingham, with hir husbondes awnte, Seynt Ebbe, abbes of the same monastery, and was a nonne veyled and professid by the same Archebisshop of Yorke, Seynt Wilfride, and the next yere aftir hir fadir repayred an olde monastery for hir in the kyngdome of Hely, where she was made abbes.

Howe this holy mayde was pursued of hir husbonde and at the last fled vnto Hely.

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Than Seynt Austyn come in to Ynglonde, he bildud in the same kyngdome a monastery and halowed it in the worship of Our Lady. Of the which work, Kyng Ethelbert was first founder with Seynt Austyn, and in the same monastery ordenyd monkes for to serue god, which aftirward Penda, on of the hethen kynges of this londe, destroyed, [fol. 54r] and putt out tho monkes and made ther-of a wyldernes, which aftirward as it is rehersed, Seynt Ethelbert, the fadir of Seynt Awdre,² repayred ayen on to a monastery of nonnes. Yet whiles this holy mayde lyved vnder goode religious gouernaunce of Seynt Ebbe, which was abbes of Coldingham, the Kyng Egride, hir secund husbonde, cowd not suffre that devorse, but be counsell of summe of his meane was abowte to take hir oute ayen. Whan the holy maide herde that, she commendid to God hir chastite and fled vnto an hille ther besyde with two nonnes of the same monastery, where our Lorde shewed a wonder miracle, for he made the watir of the see flowe rounde aboute the hille and there kepte bothe hir and hir maydenes from the pursute of that kyng, and so hidde tho virgyns lyfyng by prayers without mete and drinke a longe while. That meruelousworke of God seyng, the kyng which pursued hir repentid him of his presumptuous pursuyng, and so turned home ayene, committynng hem to god that so meruelously preserued hem.

In the menewhile that she was there, hir two nonnes for lakkyng of watir were right thistlewe. Than the holy virgyn, Seynt Awdre, prayed deuotly to God for some socoure, and anon a well of fressh swete watir sprange vp at hir fete, [fol. 54v] wherof all they were relevid of their thrist and thankid God. And yit in to this day, the same well is ther and callid Seynt Awdryes well. Than fewe dayes aftir, Seynt Awdre toke with hir both hir nonnes and passid over the watir of Humbyr and so come streyght into Hely. And in hir goyng, there was such a stronge hete by the way, that bothe she and hir to nonnes lay and restid hem vnder an hille. And Seynt Awdre picched hir staffe at hir hede in the grounde. It was not so sone in the grounde, but it wax grene and bare grene leues, and with in processe of tyme it grewe in to a grete hoke. Therefore evir aftir that place was and is called Awdre-is Stowe, that is for say Awdre-is³ resting place, and is nowe made ther a fayre

² This is obviously a mistake, as Audrey's father is Anna.

³ Awdre-is] awres is.

chapell in the worship of Seynt Awdre.

Whan this holy mayde, Seynt Awdre, come in to Hely, howe she lyved and passid out of this wrecchid worlde.

Whan this holy virgyne, Seynt Awdre, was come to hir olde possession of Hely, which hir first husband yaf hir, which place was som tyme callid Elge, that is for to say Goddis Grounde and aftir was callid Hely, that is for to say the worthi hous of God, she than [fol. 55r] gadred many sistres to hir and encreased ther an holy congregacioun of nonnes in the yere of Our Lorde sex hundreth seventy and thre. And fro that tyme forth, aftir tyme she was entred as abbes in to that monastery, she weyred nevir vnto hir lyves ende but wollyn next hir, ne ete nevir but o mele a daye, euyr in prayers continuel nyght and day and mochwacche, takyng right litell slepe,⁴ and that but a litell while a-fore midnyght, for all way aftir matines she woke till daye in holy prayers in the chirch, aftir tyme the covent were gone to reste.

She tolde also by the spiryte of prophecie of the deth of many of hir monastery, what daye and what houre they shuld passe out of this worlde, hir owne day also whan⁵ she shuld dye, and of what seknes she tolde, for she said that she shulde dye of a swenysye and so she did. ffor whan our lorde had touched hir with a swelling in the cheke and abolnyng in the nekke, she wolde say ofte tymes that she had more ioye ther-of than of any other seknes, ffor she wolde some tyme say to hir systres that she was glad for to⁶ haue suche a speciall seknes, for as moche as som tyme she sayde she had gret ioy for to aray hir nek with broches and houches in hir yonge age, "Therefore blessid be the yifte of God and God in his yefte that thus hathe [fol. 55v] chaunged worldly ioyes in to gostly iewellis, which shuld purge and clense my soule fro the trespas of wanton lightnes that I used in my yowthe. Therefore nowe, for gold and precious stones, shynith in my cheke and in my nek the rednes and the hete of swellinges."

⁴ *sh* struck through before *sleep*.

⁵ whan] wha.

⁶ *to* omitted MS.

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In so myche that seknes encresed day by day, that at laste a wyse leche was sent aftir for to do his cure. The leche⁷ come and laughed and cut that swelling vnder hir cheke so that the mater went oute and the swelling a batid, and aftir that she was well esyd and lightid to dayes aftir, but the third day it swellid ayen that she chaunged this wrecchid life by temporall deth into euerlasting lyfe and so passid out of this world on Seynt John Baptist even, whos holy body was layde in a chest of tre and beried.

Of the translacion of Seynt Awdre, howe sixtene yere aftir she was founde in body all hole incorrupte.

Aftir tyme this holy virgyn, Seynt Awdre, had lay in the grounde sixtene yere, for many miracles that was shewed where that she lay, it was ordenyd by Seynt Sexburge, which was aftir hir abbes, that the holy body shuld be translated and layed in a more solempne place and in the mene while, brethern of the same place were sent a bowte on to diuerse places for to seke [fol.56r] some trough made of ston for to lay hir in because she lay in a chest of tre. And as thei sought in diuerse places, they come at laste into a desolate towne by side Cawmbrige, which was callid Grauncetre, and there sodenly thei found a white marble stone of alabastre evyn mete and shape for hir body. That they toke with hem and went home with grete ioy.

At the day sett of translacion, which was of Seynt Luke—is evyn, the abbes, Sexburge, went first in to the grave with certeyn of hir sistern and brethern and sett honde vp on the chest, and in the taking vp they herd a voyce which sayde a lowde, “*Sit nomini domini gloria*”⁸, that is “To the name of our God; be ioy and glorye”. Than thei openyd the chest and founde the body vncorrupte, swete smelling and lyghing as she had that same day first be layde therin: more like as she had be a slepe, than ded. The seknes also that she had in hir neke, apperid all hole withoute any wounde saue a litill marke in a maner of a seme ther she was cutte. Of the which bare wittenes the same leche that lawnced it, which was ther present amonge all other peple and seyde that he him—selfe lawnced it.

⁷ *ly* struck through before *leche*.

⁸ *Sit nomini domini gloria* in a different script.

How monkes were putt in to the same monastery aftirward many yere by Seynt Ethelwolde.

Aftir seynt Awdre–is dayes and a longe⁹ tyme aftir Seynt [fol. 56v] Sexburgh is dayes, the same monastery of Hely was destroyed by paynemes in the tyme that Seynt Edmunde was slayne and than it stode occupied with secular chanones which levyd vnclenly, vnto the tyme Seynt Ethelwolde come and by the helpe of Kynge Edgar putt oute tho chanones and sett in monkys, and then repayred the monastery newe. A–monge all tho monkes, Seynt Ethelwolde made the priore of Wynchestre first abbot in þe same place, which was callid Brightnode. The same holy bisshope than bought diuerse maners and places and yaf it to the chirch of Seynt Awdre for to mentene the seruauntes of God in the same place.

Of diuerse miracles shewed in the same place there she lieth in tyme of the Danes.

In the tyme of the Danes, whan the monastery of nonnes was destroyed, ther was a payneme which had gret despite of Seynt Awdries tombe and wolde oft in reprove smyte it with his swerde. And so oft he smote ther onn, in the tyme he made vpon the same tombe an hole, which hole is sene vnto this day. And whan he had do that, a–none forthwith, withoute any taryeng, he was blynde and so dighed full cursedly.

Of an other miracle shewed in that same tyme whan secular chanons dwellid ther.

[fol.57r] There was a man which was callid Brightstone that had be a grete vsurer and an evill lyver. At the laste he felle in a grete seknes, and than he made a beheste to Seynt Awdrye for to spende all the remenaunt of his yeres if he might escape that seknes, vnder the abyte of monke in hir owne monastery at Hely. And with that a–non he yaf all his goode to the abbey of Hely. That herde the kynges mynisters, and a–restid him and sett him in preson at London, and bare him on honde that he was a thefe and had robbid the kyng, and therefore it was that he wolde be a monke for to escape the payne that he was worthy for to haue. And so he lay longe in preson, bounde with sore bondes of yren.

⁹ a longe] longe a.

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At the laste he made his mone to Seynt Awdre and to Seynt Benett and prayed to hem both with wepyng and inly sorowe of hert nyght and day. So longe he prayed so, that at laste Seynt Benett and Seynt Awdre, with hir syster, Seynt Sexburgh, appered a–fore him with a grete light. To whome seyde Seynt Awdre, “Bristane, wherfore haste thou clepid vs hedir so oft with so many teeres and cryed so oft aftir vs?” “I am she,” sayde Awdre, “whom thou haste cried aftir so ofte, and this man is Seynt Benett, whos helpe thou desyrest.” With that, she said to Seynt Benett, “Lo, Benett, do nowe as oure [fol.57v] Lorde hath commaundid the.” He a–non putt his fynger in on of the holes of the yrinnes, and forth with he was losed, and with that he drewe away from him his fetes and yaf a stroke vpon on of the bemes of the house, as all the hous shuld had falle downe. With that noyse, the keepers a–woke and thought that all the presoners had broke lose, and a–rose an lokid and fonde hem all fast i nough, saue Bristane, for he was loose. Of that they wondred gretly for he was fastest y–bounde of hem all. Of this, thei anone tolde Quene Mawte, and howe these holy seyntis were there and loosed him. Than the quene made him free and delyuered him out of preson, and so he made him–selfe a monke of Hely and lyved well to his lyves ende. And in remembraunce of this miracle yit in to this day, the same bondes of yrin hangyn at Hely.

Of an vndirshreve which was a combrous man and a wikked to the monastery of Hely in benymmyng the lyvelode and possessions of Seynt Awdre.

Ther was a shreve of Cambrigeshire which had a man with him that was a fell wikked man and was callid Gervayse. The shreve made this Gervayse, for because he was so full of extorcion, undirshreve of Cambrigeshire and commit–tyd¹⁰

[Folio 58 is lost]

[fol.59r] and a continuell besecher to our lorde for the trespasses of theym that trespasen hereyn. The same that thou sighest pray afore the maieste of God, amonge the company of holy spiritis, the laste nyght. And nowe I am come, in this tyme of pestelence, for to

¹⁰ –*tyd* written below the line, catchword for missing page.

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make hole all that be nowe seke in this monasterye." And so it was. All tho which were seke, were made hole and thankyd God.

Of an othir wikkid man of Cambrigeshire¹¹ that occupied the londes of Seynt Awdre wrongfully.

Ther was a man which was callid Picote and was a Norman and shreve of Cambrigeshire. This Picote occupied certeyn londes longyng vnto Seynt Awdre of Hely by extorcon, which Picote was warnyd oft tymes, of many folke, that he shuld leve of and hurt not the lyvelode and the freedome of the place of that holy virgyn, Seynt Awdre, lest veniaunce falle to him. Than he sayde, "Who is that Awdre of whom ye speke? I knowe hir not, and therefore hir londis I shall not leve." He had not so sone sayde thus, but that sodenly he dyed, no man wyst howe.

Thus endith the holy life and the miracles of Seynt Awdre of Hely.

[fol.69v] **Here begynnyth the lif of Seynt Edith of Wylton**

Of the holy begynnyng of this blessid chylde: whan it was ij. yere olde howe she was offered to religion.

Blessid Edith the virgyn was the doughtir of Kynge Edgar, and of Wolfride that was a dukes doughtir, born in Kent in a litill village called Lesing: which Wolfride, Kynge Edgar had purposed for to wedde, but she wold not. For as sone as Seynt Edith was borne, she made hir-selfe a nonne of Wilton abbey and at laste was abbes ther made by Seynt Ethelwolde, bisshop of Wynchestre, and encresid vertuously and goode ensample yaf to all hir convent.

Aftir tyme the mayde Edith wax som what abowte ij. yere of age, she was committid to hir modir, by consent of hir fadir, in to the monastery of Wilton, and so ther lernyd lectrine and vertu, and at last was made none in the same place offred vp in the same age. But first,

¹¹ Cambrigeshire] Cambrgeshire.

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er than she was offred vp, ther was layde atapit afore the high awter. Wher-upon King Edgar the fadir layde many worldly iewells, as crownes of golde, golden owches and ringes, precious stones and riall clothynges. On the todir syde, the abbes, the childis modir, layde on the todir syde a blake habyte, a blak vayle and a sawter boke. Than the childe Edith was bodyn [fol.70r] chese of all these thinges which she wolde take. She went streyght to the blake wayle and caste it upon hir hede. Than the kynge with his lordes on the to syde, and the modir abbes with hir systers on the todir syde, praysid God and thankyd him hertely. And so she was offred up with *Te deum laudamus*. And as she encresid in age, so she encresid in vertues and conyng, oft tymes reding Seyntes lyves. But a-monge all that she radde, she liked best the maydinly and religious lyving of hir awnte Edith in Seynt Modewn-is dayes, which was sister to hir fadir-is brodir and was abbes of Pollisworth in Stafford-shire, lyving there with grete vertues lyving, as this yonge Edith did in Wylton abbey.

This holy yonge Edith was to hir sisters in Wilton, Martha, and to God, hir spouse, Maria. She bowed to all systers in mynistryng right lowly; she, in receyving of gestis, shewid hir full charitably in gladsom etyng a-monges theym; and yit in abstinence, so absteynyng, that plente of mete and drinke was never the lesse. All erthly fauour she forsoke: to the seke she was full petyvous; to the destitute, full comfortable; and cherished more lepres than lordis children. For the more fouler a sek man were, the more pite she had vpon hym and the more benynge she was for to¹² serue him. To the blynde, she [fol.70v] was an eygh of mercy; to the feble, a staf of comforth and supporting; to the nedy, mete and drinke and clothing; and to hem that were discomfortid, she was comforth and solace.

The sharpe heyre she vsed upon hir nakyd body, and upon hir body above, she weyred cloth ryall of purpull made blak. And therefore, in a tyme whan Seynt Ethelwolde sigh hir go in suche precious clothes and habite, he seyde to hir in maner of a blame: "O doughter, spouses of Criste go not to the chambyr of our Lorde with such ryall clothyng, for of suche outward aray, the hevenly spouse hath no ioy ne delyte, but of inward aray." Vpon this she,

¹² was for] was to for.

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knowyng well that hir welbeloved spouse was within hir, answerd thus a–yen: “Leve me well Fadir, my soule is neuer the ferther fro God vndir this rich a–byte, than though I weyred abostous slaven. I have my Lorde with–in me, that takith not hede only to the clothes outward, but to þe soule with inforth.” This holy man anon felt of hir gret auctorite of grace within, and durst no more say for displesaunce of Him that was within hir, but rathir, praying our Lord in his Seyntis which workith in theym as he will, considering in him–selfe that it is no fors what a chosyn soule weyre, so it be clene with yn.

And where that evir this holy mayde went, she had in an holy custom for to blesse hir forhed, hir brest and every worke that she began. In a tyme, as she was wont, she bare in a disshe of mete for to yeve a pore [fol.71r] man. þer come a child¹³ and met with hir sodenly by the way, vpon the to side of hir and axid her som almes. And she tornyd her for to yif him the same almes, with blessing a–fore of the crosse, but the childe that axid it vanysshid away and durst no more aperer. That was no goode childe which lovid not the crosse.

Howe this mayden was made Abbes of Berkyng and of Wynchestre and ordenyd for to be Abbes of Wylton.

Whan this holy mayde Seynt Edith was fyftene yere olde, hir fadir Edgar ordenyd by Seynt Dunston and Seynt Ethelwolde for to make hir abbes of thre monasteries of nonnes, on of Wynchestre, and an othir of Barkyng, and the third of Wylton. She was disposed and so she was, but yit wold she neuer go out from Wilton. Ther that she began to serue God first, ther wold she abyde for evir. Save in euery place that she was abbes of, she ordenyd gostly moders suche as she myght truste to for þe goode gouernaunce of religion, leyver to be vnder gouernaunce of a gostly modir, than to be a modir hir–selfe, rathir to be bodyn than to bydde.

Whan hir fadir Edgar was dede, his son and hir brother, Seynt Edward, was kyng after him, yit beyng a childe. And in a tyme, this holy mayde had a dreame and hir thought that

¹³ *child* written in above the line.

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hir right eygh was put oute, which she tolde hir systers and expounyd it hir–selfe in [fol.71v] this wyse: “Me semyth, sisters, that this vision betokenyth the deth of my brothir Edward, which I holde my right eygh.” And it happid, ffor it was not longe aftir, as he went for to se his brothir Ethelred, he was kyllid of the children of wikkednes, by counsell of his stepdame. Than the lordis of this reme wolde had oute Seynt Edith for to governe this reme, as the next eyre aftir hir brothir, but she wold not. They asayed by mastrye for to haue hir out, but they cowth not: they might rather torne stones and melt hem as lede, than for to make hir to leve hir holy purpose of religion.

Of the glorious passing of Seynt Edith and of hir translacion.

In a tyme, whan she had made a chapell of Seynt Denyce and prayed Seynt Dunstone for to cum halowe it, this holy bisshop Seynt Dunstone sigh as they went to gedres howe this holy mayde oft tyme crossid hir forhed with the signe of the crosse. Of the which he had grete ioy and toke hir by the right honde and sayde, “I pray God, doughtir, that this finger never rote.” Anon, the same day at masse¹⁴, aftir tyme he had halowed that chapell of Seynt Denyce, he fille in a grete weping and sobbid out of course, othirwyse than he was wont to do, inso moche than, whan he hallowed hir, he sobbyd sore. After masse it was¹⁵ axed of his dekon [fol.72r] why he wept so sore, and he seyde, with grete sighinges, “This welbeloved soule to God, this glorious starr, Edith, shall hastily passe out of this wrecchyd world and out of this erthly dwelling place. For this blinde, cursyd world is not worthy for to have the presens of so gret a light. This day, thre and fourty dayes, this fayre, bright soule shall lese the fals light of this worlde and fynde light evirlastinge in the blisse of heven. O, shall thus be take from vs the light of Seyntes, and we shull sytte in derknes and in þe shadowe of deth. Oure vnripe life of olde age hurtith vs, that whiles we slomber in age, she shall entre the paleys of blisse.”

Whan the tyme came that she shulde passe, Seynt Dunstone was by hir, and armed hir soule with many holy exortacions and prayers, and so in hir passage he commendid hir in

¹⁴ *Aftir masse he was struck through after do.*

¹⁵ *she struck through; it was written above it.*

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to the handis of our Lorde. In the mene while, ther was a nonne of the same place for fere ranne in to¹⁶ the high chirch from þe same place where she died, and herd a gret multitude singyng as it had be in the quere. And as she listenyd what songe that might be, ouer come to hir a feyre man, and a semly, and bad hir come no nere for the holy aungells of God were come, for to haue with hem to the blisse of heven the goode mayde of this monastery. So Seynt Edith was clepid in all þe contray aboute: the goode mayde of Wylton. And ther-fore, [fol.72v] in hir passage, our lorde will þat she passe to the place of evir lastinge ioye,with myrth and gladnes of songe.

And so the thre and twenty yere of hir age, and the sextene day of the moneth of Octobrer, which is the morne aftir the vitas of the natiuite of Our Lady, she passid with myrth and melodye out of this worlde, the yere of our Lorde nyne hundreth foure score and foure. And Seynt Dunstone beryd hir in the same chirch of Seynt Denys that she made afore. Of þe same chirch oft tymes she wold prophecye by hir lyve that she shuld be beried ther-yn, and therefore, oft tymes, a-fore she wolde be ther and pray with many teres that she myght dye well. And therbesyde the same chirch, whiles she lyved, she made an almes house, wher in ben refreshed in to this day thirtene pore folke.

Of the holy apparicion, howe this holy mayde apperyd to hir modir and tolde hir comfortable tythings, howe she was welcome to our Lorde.

The third day aftir, this holy mayde Seynt Edith apperid to hir modir Wilfryde, fayr and glad and with bright, shynyng clothes, seying to hir modir in this wyse: that she was acceptable and welcom to þe kynge of blysse, as sone as she passid out of this worlde. "And yet the fende accused me afore our Lorde," she seyde, "but by the helpe and comforth of the holy apostelis, by the victorious passion and crosse of [fol.73r] our Lorde Jhesu Criste, I ouer come him and destroyed his malice."

The same thirty day aftir hir passing, ther was a worthi mans childe borne, for the which childe whiles she levyd, she was prayed to be godmoder. Whan that evir it were borne

¹⁶ to written above line.

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she grauntid therto and sayde, “Whan that ever it be borne, if it please God I will be godmodir.” Whan the childe was borne and brought to chirch for to be cristenyd, Seynt Alphee cristenyd it. And whan he shuld yif the childe the candill in hir honde aftir bapteme, seying the wordes, “Haue nowe and take the light in thyn honde by the which thou mayste entre to the wedding fest of our Lorde,” anone in saying of these wordes, apperid Seynt Edith, halding the childe and stretchid forth a farye litill honde for to take hir candell of wax, and so hilde it vnto þe tyme the seruice of cristenyng was done. By this vndirstode Seynt Alphe, the bisshop, that this childe was graciously chosyn of God, and than bad the frendes noryssh this childe fro this day forthwarde for to be despousid to our Lorde, and for to be maried to his holy seruyce in¹⁷ religion. This childe was cristenyd and namyd Brithyne, which was aftirward made nonne of Wylton, and aftir that abbes of the same monastery and lyved an holy life and so died in our lorde vertuously.

Howe she appered, thirtene yere aftir, to Seynt Dunston by a vision and tolde him by speciall [fol.73v] tokenes that he shuld¹⁸ go to Wylton and translate hir.

Thirtene yere aftir she was beried, she appered to Seynt Dunston and seyde: “It plesith our Lorde Ihesu, of his vnspecable goodnes, for to clarifye me amonge the peple. Having mynde of his gret mercies, he will that I be translated for helth and comforth of all folke, for I am glorified in his presence a-monge the holy cetisens of aungells. Go therefore to Wilton and fulfille the bidding of God and a-raise my body out of the grounde. Be not in doute, ne think it not fantasye that I saye to the, but take it for trewthe. And in tokyn that it is trewthe that I say, thou shalt fynde my body all hole vncorrupte, as it was vndefouled by my lyve, ontake certen places which wantonly I mysused in my youthe: that is myn eyghen, myn handis, and my fete. These iij parties of my body ben rotyd: all the remenaunt is hole for I was nevir guilty by my lyve in gloteny ne in lechery. The thombe also of the ryght hande, wherwith I was wonte to crosse me in all the partyes of my body, thou shalt fynde hole, so that, by þe benygnyte of our Lorde, som party of my body is chastised by consumpcion and som reserued hole. In tokyn also, whan thou commyst

¹⁷ *l* deleted after *in*.

¹⁸ *dye* struck through after *shuld*.

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forto translate me, thou shalt fynde my body redy a rysing vpward out of the grounde.

Aftir this vision, Seynt Dunstone went vnto [fol.74r] Wylton, streyght to the tombe of this holy mayde. And sodenly he sigh Seynt Deynes and this holy mayde standing to–gedir at the awter, bright as aungelles. Which holy mayde sayde to Seynt deynes in this wyse: “Thou knowest well, Fadir, the wille of our Lorde as touching to me. Thou art sende from him hider to this bisshop Dunstane, for to enforme him of that thinge that I bad him come fore.” Than seid Seynt Deynes to Dunstane, “Brothir, thou shalt vnderstonde that the vision which was late shewed to the, of the declaracion of this dere beloved with god, Seynt Edith. It is right worthy that she be reverensed and honoured of erthly men, that is crowned amonge virgyns in heven. It is worthi that hir body, which is the temple of maydenly clennes, be worshipped, in the which the lover of virginite, Kynge of Ioy, regnyd by hir life, ffor hir plesable suffrages a–fore God ben necessary to mankynde.” Aftir this declaracion of Seynt Deynes, Dunstane anone fonde trewe by all tokenys as it was sayde, and translatid hir the third day aftir All Halowe day.

Of a monk of Glastinbury howe he wolde had cut away a pece of hir cote with in hir tombe and of a nonne which wolde had cutte away a pece of hir hede bonde in hir graue.

A monke ther was of Glastinbury, that was callid Edulph, which in a tyme prevely cut away, out of hir tombe, a pece of Seynt Edithis [fol.74v] cote, and as he was therabowte, folily with the cote he cut hir body, in so meche that it bled and made all blody the pament ther she lay. Than, for fere, the monke threw his knyfe from him and fell down to the grounde and axid foryevenes for the sacrelegie and theft that he had do, and nevir wolde vnto the tyme he had foryevenes of his trespace. With that, he loked abowte and founde the pament drye with out any coloure of blode, and so he knewe well his trespas was foryeven.

In the same wyse, ther was a woman, a nonne of the same house of Wylton, which, for

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deuocion, desyred for to haue a pece of¹⁹ hir hede²⁰ bonde and, in a tyme, went prevely to hir tombe and wolde had cut a litill pece prevely away of the same. And as she was therabowte, þe holy mayde lift vp hir hed as though she had be a-lyve, and so made hir a-ferde that she durst no more do so but repentid hir of that she had done.

Of kyng Knvte of Inglonde: howe he had no byleve that Seynt Edith was a Seynt for asmoche as hir fadir kyng Edgar was namyd for a vicious man of his body.

Inn a tyme, whanne kyng Knute made a feste at Wylton vpon Whitsonday, it was tolde him howe that kyng Edгарis doughtir, Edith, was a Seynt. He seyde he cowde not beleve that, for asmoche as hir fadir kyng Edgar was a vicious man of his body and scornyd hir and sayde it might not be sothe for I shall nevir beleve that. Than [fol.75r] Ednoth, the bisshop of Canterbury, which was ther present, seyde that she was a worthi Seynt. And affir mete, the tombe of Seynt Edith was openyd that the kyng might se howe she laye²¹ vncorrupte. Anon, the holy mayde Edith rose vp to the girdelstede and in maner lift vp hir honde ayenste the kyng that was so obstenate, by way of threting. With that, the kyng fill down for fere to the grounde, almoste ded. At the laste, he caught breth and rose vp ayen, and was sore ashamed of him-selfe and of his folius presumpcion and obstinacye, axing mercy and foryevenes of that holy mayde, and evir affir did hir gret reuerens and worship as to a seynt. ffor, in a tyme as he was in the see in a shippe, he stode in gret perile. And than he prayed help of Seynt Edith, and forth with the eyre waxed souple, and he and his, by hir prayers, come to goode haven.

Of a miracle shewed to Alred, the Erchbisshop of Yorke, which was in grete perill of the see.

Inn a tyme, the archbisshop of York, that was callid Alrede, as he was in the see he stode in grete perille of perissing. In the which perill he cryed help of Seynt Edith. And a-non, Seynt Edith stode a-fore him visibly and seyde, "I am Edith to whom thou prayest. Thou

¹⁹ of of] of.

²⁰ the here struck through before *hir hede*.

²¹ s struck through before *laye*.

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shalt not perissh." With that, the stormys of the see cessid and was souple, and so come to londe safe and sounde.

Of venieauns that fill to on that toke away londe which longed to Seynt Edith and the [fol.75v] house of Wilton.

There was on that had take away, wrongfully, certeyn londe longynge to Seynt Edith and to the monastery of Wilton, and therefore he dyed so vnrepentaunt. But aftir tyme he was dede, with in a litill while, he aroose and seyde, "Haue mercy vpon me and helpe me now, ye that ben my trewe frendis to my soule, for I may not suffre the indignacion of Seynt Edith, that holy virgyn, in as moche as she will not suffre me nothir to be in hevyn, ne in erth, ne in no cuntrey, vnto the tyme the londe which I haue take from hir be restorid ayen. And therefore, ye goddis trewe children, helpe me now and yelde the same londe ayen, for vnto the tyme that be do, she will not suffre me nothir to lif ne to digh." His frendis, hering this, restored the londe ayen and than he yelde the spirite and so died well.

Thus endith the life of Seynt Edith, the goode mayde of Wilton.

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