



S.E. Kelly, ed., *Charters of Barking Abbey and Waltham Holy Cross*  
*Anglo-Saxon Charters* 20 (Oxford: British Academy, 2021). Print,  
368 pp., \$115 USD, ISBN: 9780197266885.

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*Review*

It has been some six years since the publication of volume 19 of the British Academy's 'Anglo-Saxon Charters' series. That volume, *Charters of Chertsey Abbey*, came at the tail end of a period of remarkable productivity for the series, with nine volumes having appeared over the previous decade. As such, it brings quite some pleasure (and a certain amount of relief) to see this volume, *Charters of Barking Abbey and Waltham Holy Cross*, in print with the ever-dependable Susan E. Kelly at the helm.

This is not the only volume of 'Anglo-Saxon Charters' dedicated to a female religious house — *Charters of Shaftesbury Abbey* was published in 1996. However, in contrast to Shaftesbury — indeed, in contrast to any other nunnery that operated in tenth-century England — Barking Abbey could lay claim to a long history. The viking incursions and occupations of the ninth century had created a fraught context for the continuation of monastic life, and these disruptions were occurring against a background of decreasing support for female and double religious houses among secular and ecclesiastical elites. Out of the fifty-plus female religious houses known to have operated between the years 600 and 900, Barking alone may have been able to claim continuity of community into the tenth century. And even Barking may have been abandoned in the ninth century only to have been occupied in the tenth. The fact

is, the documentary evidence is fragmentary. There was certainly a female religious community at Barking in the eighth century and in the tenth century. The foundation's status between these periods remains obscure, and the charters that Kelly presents in this volume reflect this fragmented history. The volume contains ten edited diplomas under the heading 'Charters of Barking Abbey', numbered 1–10, alongside an appendix annotating a single forged charter. Three of the numbered charters date to the seventh century, while the other seven date to the tenth and early eleventh centuries.

Charters 1 and 2 are early documents. Recorded in Sawyer as 1171 and 1246, the first is a grant by Hodilredus to Abess Hedilburga and dates to perhaps 670 x 680, though Kelly offers various dates in both the introductory material and the charter analysis (pp. 84, 125). The charter survives as a single, contemporary sheet and much of the analysis is given over to the technical aspects of the manuscript and palaeography. The second charter relates to an endowment by Bishop Eorcenwold attributed to 677, although the single-sheet diploma from which copies were made, and which was extant in the sixteenth century, has since disappeared. Kelly identifies the charter as containing contemporary material, based on comparisons with S1247, but that, in substance, the document should be dated to the eleventh century (pp. 142–3).

While charter 3 is also an early document (S65a/b) — a grant of thirty hides in Nazeing, Essex, dating to 693 x 709 — it is more logically grouped with the charters that follow it as these all survive as sixteenth-century copies in Hatfield House MS

Ilford Hospital I/6. The Ilford Hospital charters remain desperately understudied and, of the eight presented here in connection to Barking Abbey, only charter 3 has previously been edited. Kelly's provision of their texts and associated, meticulous commentary is perhaps this volume's greatest asset and triumph. Charter 3, however, may seem something of an odd inclusion at first glance. While Kelly suggests that the charter appears authentic, if rewritten, she also states that it seems to have no connection to Barking whatsoever (pp. 85, 152). Its inclusion is due to its presence in the Ilford Hospital manuscript alongside charters 4–10, all of which appear to have originated in the medieval archive of Barking Abbey. Presumably, at some point the abbey held claims or connections to the lands mentioned in these charters, but this is not provable. Charter 3 is an example of this, as is charter 4 (S418a), the first of the tenth-century documents. This is a land grant from King Æthelstan (d.939) to Abbot Beorhtsige dating to 932. It is not known whether Beorhtsige was an abbot of Barking, nor where the given estate at Buram was located; all that is certain is that the lands were not in the possession of Barking after 1066 (p. 162). Of the eight charters from the Ilford Hospital manuscript, only charter 8 (S552a), granted by King Eadred (d.955) in the year 950, is a direct grant of lands to Barking Abbey itself.

While much could be said of the other charters in the volume's first section — charters 5 and 6 (S517a/b), for example, are grants to *sanctimoniales* (religious women) — Barking Abbey is not the only ecclesiastical institution dealt with in this volume. Waltham Abbey also receives a dedicated study. However, Barking must be understood as the book's primary focus: the history of the abbey and its archives and

charters take up the first 124 pages, the transcription and analysis of the charters themselves, run for the following 90 pages. In contrast, the whole section on Waltham Holy Cross comes to a little under 100 pages.

Waltham Holy Cross is quite a late foundation in the context of the 'Anglo-Saxon Charters' series. It was established as a college of secular canons by Earl Harold Godwineson (d.1066) around the year 1060 (though it was converted into an Augustinian Abbey in 1177). Only one pre-Norman charter survives, this issued by King Edward the Confessor (d.1066) in 1062, confirming the lands and privileges bestowed on the minster. Given this short pre-Conquest history and lack of administrative documentation, it is hardly a surprise that Waltham does not occupy the same space in the book as Barking does. However, the charter in question — number 11 in this book (S1036) — is of remarkable size and complexity. Kelly uses the word 'stupendous', though, perhaps more importantly, she also uses the word 'fabricated' (p. 211). To make the charter manageable, Kelly divides it into eleven parts; the first is the text of the grant itself with analysis, while the subsequent ten sections each take one part of the clause and provides extensive analysis of the estate identification and history as well as the clause itself. It is by far one of the most exhaustive charter analyses I have had the pleasure to read.

I do find it a shame that there is no remit for wills to be covered in the volume alongside charters as, for example, the inclusion of S1486 and S1494 would provide for a fuller view of Barking's estates and royal connections. I also found the discussion of charter authenticity in the prefatory material somewhat frustrating, not because of

its quality, but because of its isolation. A discrete section entitled 'The authenticity of the charters' has been included in volumes of the 'Anglo-Saxon Charters' series throughout the twenty-first century. However, typically, some assessment of such can also be found in the analysis following each charter text, but I did not find this to be the case for this volume. Bearing in mind that these are primarily reference books, I found this something of a limitation to the ease of finding the information relevant to a specific charter.

As is to be expected of Kelly's scholarship and the 'Anglo-Saxon Charters' series, this is an excellent and rigorous volume. It hardly needs my recommendation for all scholars who work on the history of pre-Conquest England and for all libraries where such is taught and researched. It is a self-evidently valuable volume, as all the books in this series have been. Most importantly, however, some forty years after the rediscovery of the charters in the Ilford Hospital manuscript, Kelly has undertaken critical work to make this neglected group of diplomas accessible.

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