

# 'Sisters Under the Skin'? Anglo-Saxon Nuns and Nunneries in Southern England

Barbara Yorke  
King Alfred's College, Winchester

The history of female monastic life in Anglo-Saxon England has generally been seen as falling into two distinct phases conveniently separated by the Carolingian Renaissance and the Viking invasions of the ninth century. The nunneries of the first phase are the 'double monasteries', mixed communities of nuns and monks or priests which in England always seem to have been under the control of an abbess.<sup>1</sup> Scarcely any of these double monasteries survived as nunneries into the second phase, and it is generally assumed that the Vikings delivered the *coup de grâce* to those which were still in existence in the ninth century. The nunneries of the second phase were predominantly new foundations and most had a continuous history as communities of Benedictine nuns until the Reformation.<sup>2</sup> Given this natural dichotomy, there has been a tendency among historians to specialise in the study of one group or another, or to draw contrasts between the two periods with the stricter claustration and poorer intellectual standards of the Benedictine period compared unfavourably with the greater opportunities for participation in and equality with the world of the male religious which apparently existed earlier.<sup>3</sup>

This generalised picture of nunneries in Anglo-Saxon England contains some undoubted truths, but like all generalisations it is in danger of simplifying a state of affairs which was in reality more complex. Some of its assumptions rest on remarkably slender evidence. For instance, one of the greatest contrasts between the two phases is seen to be the different ways in which the double monasteries and the later nunneries were organised, but how much do

we really know about this? Until the production of the *Regularis Concordia* (970x3) which was to apply to all the English monasteries and nunneries we do not possess the text of a monastic rule which was definitely used by an English nunnery.<sup>4</sup> We may turn to Continental examples to help fill the gaps in our knowledge, but we can never be certain what Rules were being followed in any of the English nunneries until the tenth-century reformation. When there are only a few limited facts there is a desire to link them together and by joining up the dots to produce a recognisable pattern. Thus there are Viking raids on religious communities in the ninth century and many of the early nunneries make their last appearance in written records of the same period; the assumption that the Vikings were responsible for the disappearance of the double monasteries is a conclusion that many have found irresistible.

The Anglo-Saxon nunneries of southern England provide relatively well-recorded communities in both phases through which some of these generalisations can be explored. By southern England is meant England south of the Thames and the written material which we possess means in effect that discussion is limited to the nunneries of Kent and Wessex.<sup>5</sup> As might be expected from the chronology of the conversion the earliest nunneries in southern England are those of Kent. According to Kentish traditions the earliest of the Kentish double monasteries was Lyminge founded for Æthelburga by her brother King Eadbald when she was forced to retreat to Kent after the death of her husband Edwin of Northumbria in 633. Subsequent foundations were Folkestone (founded for Eanswith, daughter of King Eadbald), Sheppey (founded for Queen Seaxburga, wife of King Earconbert and mother of King Hlothre), Minster-in-Thamet (founded in compensation for the murder of the princes Æthelred and Æthelbert) and Hoo (apparently founded by King Caedwalla of Wessex).<sup>6</sup> Our main narrative source for the early history of the five nunneries is contained in the hagiographic traditions surrounding St Mildrith of Minster-in-Thamet and her numerous female relatives who spent at least part of their lives in one of the Kentish double monasteries. The material is known collectively as the Mildrith Legend and has been edited recently by David Rollason who has established that the earliest form of the text was assembled in the eighth century, though a substantial number of different versions survive with a variety of later accretions.<sup>7</sup> The Mildrith Legend is far from ideal as a historical source and it is unfortunate (and rather

surprising) that Bede does not mention any of the Kentish nunneries. However, the existence of at least four of the nunneries by the end of the seventh century is confirmed by King Wihtred's grant of privileges to the Kentish monasteries in 699.<sup>8</sup> Charters survive for Minster-in-Thamet and Lyminge,<sup>9</sup> and valuable additional information is provided by the correspondence between Bishop Boniface and various female religious in Kent.<sup>10</sup>

Nunneries in Wessex before the tenth century are inadequately recorded and probably more existed than can be definitely identified from the surviving sources. The best known of the early West Saxon nunneries is Wimborne which was founded for or by Cuthburga, a sister of King Ine of Wessex (688-710),<sup>11</sup> and is described in the *Vita* of Boniface's kinswoman Leoba (Leofgyth) who spent part of her early years as a nun in the double monastery.<sup>12</sup> The *Life of Leoba* by Rudolf of Fulda contains some memorable passages on the strict regime at Wimborne where a wall apparently separated male and female members of the community in the church and the abbess only spoke to her priests through a window. Rudolf drew upon the memories of those who had known Leoba, but his account should not be taken simply at face value. He wrote after the Carolingian legislation had laid fresh emphasis on the need for strict female claustration and separation from male religious and this may have influenced his portrayal of the life at Wimborne. In addition, Leoba's correspondence with Boniface suggests that there were aspects of her early career of which Rudolf was unaware.<sup>13</sup> Insight into life in a West Saxon double monastery is also provided by a poem written by Aldhelm on the church of Bugga, daughter of King Centwine of Wessex (676-85) where there were separate choirs of monks and nuns and where male and female lectors read the lessons.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately the location of the church is not given. We know that there was an important West Saxon nunnery at Wareham in whose church King Beorhtric was buried (d. 802),<sup>15</sup> and there were apparently other West Saxon nunneries which provided Boniface with missionaries and other assistance, but nothing of any substance is known about them.<sup>16</sup>

The question of the fate of the double monasteries will be looked at in greater detail later; suffice it to say for the moment that none of them survived on any scale as nunneries into the later Saxon period when the kings of Wessex became kings of England, and none of them appear as nunneries in Domesday Book. The nunneries of this second phase were all new foundations; Shaftesbury was the first of

the new wave and was founded by King Alfred for his daughter Æthelgifu.<sup>17</sup> It was followed by Nunnaminster in Winchester, established by Alfred's widow Ealhswith,<sup>18</sup> and Romsey and Wilton which were founded in the reign of Edward the Elder probably for members of his family.<sup>19</sup> Two further nunneries were built at Amesbury and Wherwell early in the reign of King Æthelred Unraed by his mother Ælfthryth.<sup>20</sup> The written records for all these nunneries are disappointingly slight. Charters exist for all except Amesbury, but are few in number and throw only a spasmodic light on the history of the foundations.<sup>21</sup> The surviving saints' lives were all written after the Norman Conquest. Goscelin wrote lives of Edith of Wilton and her kinswoman Wulfhild of Barking (which also contains information on Wilton) in the 1070's,<sup>22</sup> and a life of Eadburga of Nunnaminster was produced by Osbert of Clare in the second quarter of the twelfth century.<sup>23</sup> Both authors undoubtedly drew upon earlier written materials and traditions about their subjects, but also shaped this material to provide acceptable portraits of sainthood and of desirable behaviour by nuns. Some of the circumstantial detail seems convincing, for instance, that concerning the education of Edith, but a doubt must always remain about how far the material can be trusted, particularly details such as the hairshirt Edith is reputed to have worn beneath her fine clothing, for one of Goscelin's and Osbert's main themes is the humility of their subjects.<sup>24</sup> William of Malmesbury, Florence of Worcester and many other post-Conquest historians record additional information about the later nunneries, but their accounts are not always historically viable.

Even this cursory survey of the surviving evidence for the southern nunneries of Anglo-Saxon England makes it clear that comparison of the houses of different periods is difficult because the sources for all periods are fragmentary and not consistently of the same type. Of course, the nunneries are also mentioned in various narrative histories from the Anglo-Saxon period and are covered by blanket royal and ecclesiastical legislation. It is in fact through the topic of relations with the outside world, both secular and religious, that it is easiest to compare the houses of different periods; it is the internal histories and practices of the individual houses that it is so difficult to reconstruct.

Looking at the nunneries from the point of view of their relations with the outside world what is immediately striking is the extent to which they were royal foundations and remained *eigenklöster* of their different royal houses. All the Anglo-Saxon nunneries in southern

England for which we have the relevant evidence were founded by members of a royal house, usually by either the reigning monarch or one of his close female relatives; it is not always clear which should be described as the founder. Not only were the nunneries founded by one of the ruling house, but they continued to be regarded as possessions of the royal house throughout their existence. This fact is made clear in King Wihtred's grant of privileges to the Kentish monasteries (the majority of which were the nunneries) in which they were freed from royal dues, but were to show him and his successors honour and obedience.<sup>25</sup> Wihtred's lawcode makes a similar claim.<sup>26</sup> In the eighth century Abbess Eangyth who ruled one of the Kentish double monasteries complained to Bishop Boniface that one of her greatest problems was the *servitum* that her monastery owed to the king and queen.<sup>27</sup> Further confirmation of the fact that the Kentish nunneries were regarded as possessions of the royal house comes from the attempts made by the Mercian and West Saxon conquerors of Kent to take control of religious houses which had been founded by members of the Kentish royal house. Archbishop Wulfred in particular fought a spirited battle against claims from the Mercian royal house to the nunnery of Minster-in Thanet and was driven to forging documents to try and prove his case.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless by the tenth century it appears that the lands of a number of the Kentish nunneries formed part of the royal estates of the West Saxon kings and so presumably the West Saxon conquerors of Kent in the ninth century had been successful in taking over these lands on the grounds that they had inherited the position of the former Kentish rulers.<sup>29</sup>

We do not have such an explicit statement as Wihtred's from any of the later kings of Wessex about the nature of their relationship with nunneries, though it is stated in the laws of Alfred that a nun should not be removed from a nunnery without the permission of the king or bishop.<sup>30</sup> It is implicit in the actions of the kings that they regarded the nunneries as royal possessions. Wilton, for instance, seems to have been founded by Edward the Elder for one of his daughters and was later used by his grandson Edgar as a convenient endowment for a discarded mistress and her daughter. In the *Regularis Concordia* the English nunneries are placed under the specific charge of the queen partly so that scandal might be avoided.<sup>31</sup> This may not be so much an innovation as an adaption of what was already the practice in the West Saxon royal house. Dunstan in his additions to the *Regularis Concordia* specifically warns that the male patrons of

nunneries should not abuse their position and he could have had Edgar's apparent predilection for young nuns in mind.<sup>32</sup> The association of the queen with nunneries was more in keeping with monastic ideals, but preserved the proprietary claims of the royal house. Queen Ælfthryth, wife of King Edgar, seems to have made the position a reality and expelled an abbess of Barking in favour of her own nominee.<sup>33</sup>

Whatever the overall power of kings and queens over the nunneries, many of them became the possessions of subgroups within the royal house and the position of abbess might pass between royal kinswomen of a particular branch line. Minster-in-Thanel, for instance, was founded as compensation for the killing of two princes who were the sons of *regulus* Eormenred, a son of King Eadbald. So it is not surprising to find that the first abbess, Æbbe, was a sister of the murdered princes and that she was succeeded by her niece Mildrith.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately although we know the names of subsequent abbesses of Minster we do not know anything about their genealogy, but Mildrith's successor, Eadburga, who seems to have been responsible for establishing Mildrith's cult, was clearly a person of considerable importance and is treated by Bishop Boniface with the greatest respect.<sup>35</sup> Another Kentish nunnery with connections with a subgroup in the royal house is revealed in the letters of abbess Eangyth and her daughter Haeaburg, who succeeded to her mother's position. Unfortunately, in spite of some ingenious suggestions, we do not know which nunnery Eangyth and Haeaburg ruled nor their exact position in the royal house.<sup>36</sup> However, we do learn from their correspondence that their line had incurred the enmity of the king, that many male kinsmen had been forced into exile or had died and that the hostility towards them from the main royal line was a major reason for the problems of their foundation.<sup>37</sup>

We meet similar links between specific nunneries and families connected with the royal house in later Wessex. Shaftesbury, for instance, seems to have had a particular connection with the family of Ælfgifu, the first wife of King Edmund. Ælfgifu was buried at Shaftesbury when she died in 944 and was subsequently regarded as a saint.<sup>38</sup> Her promotion was no doubt helped by the fact that her mother Wynflaed also had a close connection with the nunnery and was a major benefactress.<sup>39</sup> Even more intriguing are a group of kinswomen who were abbesses at Wilton and Barking in the reign of Edgar. Goscelin relates how Edgar tried to seduce a young nun of

Wilton called Wulfhild with the connivance of the abbess Wenflaed, her aunt. Goscelin says that Wenflaed intended that Wulfhild should succeed her, but she was instead created abbess of Barking until expelled by Queen Ælfthryth.<sup>40</sup> Wilton passed instead to another kinswoman, Wulfthryth, who apparently did succumb to Edgar and was the mother of his daughter Edith who was also brought up at Wilton.<sup>41</sup> Ælfthryth's hostility to Wulfhild is presumably connected with this line's rival links with Edgar.

The continual involvement of the royal families of southern England with nunneries throughout the Anglo-Saxon period presumably indicates that the nunneries were felt to meet needs of the royal house. The reasons for the popularity of nunneries with the royal circle are never explicitly stated and can only be inferred from the uses to which nunneries were put. Two main categories of royal nun can be identified: the virgins who had been entered into monasteries as infants such as Mildrith of Minster-in-Thanel, Eadburga of Nunnaminster and Edith of Wilton, and the married women who entered nunneries after the deaths of their husbands or on separation from them. The latter group are particularly well represented in our sources. They were so numerous in the double monasteries that in the 'Treatise on Virginité' which Aldhelm wrote for the nuns of Barking a special section was added to accommodate their existence.<sup>42</sup> Aldhelm dealt with them under the heading of 'chastity' and argued that although retired married women might technically be less pleasing to God than the virgins, they might ultimately have an advantage over the latter as they were more likely to strive harder to make up for their lost virginity and be less likely to fall into the sin of spiritual pride than the complacent virgins. Several well connected West Saxon ladies were at Barking when Aldhelm wrote including Cuthburga who founded Wimborne - probably the first West Saxon nunnery - and who was separated from her husband King Aldfrith of Northumbria.

Numerous examples of queens who retired to found or live in nunneries in later Wessex can also be found from Ealhswith the widow of King Alfred onwards. It can be argued that life as an abbess would be congenial to a woman who had previously been queen and would provide her with a position of power, wealth and independence of action.<sup>43</sup> The taking of a vow to lead a religious life also made it more difficult for a woman to be married against her will and ecclesiastical and royal legislation upheld the force of such vows.<sup>44</sup>



However, some royal women were undoubtedly disposed of against their will and it is not always clear whether all those who retired from the position of queen really wanted to do so.<sup>45</sup> Did Edward the Elder's second wife Ælfflaed retire voluntarily to Wilton nunnery thus enabling Edward to marry Eadgifu or did Edward arrange for her departure? Although some of the former married women chose to live in nunneries they also provided convenient places in which male relatives could place female kin whom they wished removed from active life as is demonstrated by Edward the Confessor's attempts to place his wife in a nunnery as part of his campaign against her over-mighty male relatives.<sup>46</sup>

Infant princesses who were placed in nunneries, of course, had no say in the matter though it was a convention of saints' lives that the embryonic saints were presented with a choice between secular and ecclesiastical items and always chose the latter.<sup>47</sup> Religious vows were presumably made on behalf of such children so that they could bring credit to their relatives and spiritual advantages to those left behind in the secular world. Princesses vowed from infancy were particularly likely to become saints as occurred with Mildrith, Eadburga and Edith, though loss of virginity was not an absolute bar to other royal women acquiring sanctity. In fact it is remarkable how many royal women did become saints. The Mildrith Legend lists at least seven female members of the Kentish royal house (either by birth or through marriage) who were regarded as saints and the number could be expanded if more distant collaterals were taken into account. A comparable number could also be found from later Wessex.<sup>48</sup> Female royal saints easily outnumber male royal saints and the main way a male member of the royal house could acquire sanctity was through a violent death. Female saints in contrast were remarkably passive and their hagiographers had quite a job finding enough incidents to fill a Life. Such passivity accords well with the Anglo-Saxon ideal for womanly behaviour: 'it is fitting for a woman to be busy with her embroidery. A roving woman spreads rumour; often people defame her with shameful deeds; men speak of her insultingly; her beauty often fades'.<sup>49</sup>

It is always difficult to know where the initiative for the recognition of an early medieval person as a saint came from. It could obviously be in the interests of a foundation to promote a royal personage as saint in the hopes of attracting further patronage from the royal house. Mildrith seems to have owed her elevation to her



successor Eadburga (who may have been related to her) and the cult of the West Saxon Eadburga seems to have been promoted from within Nunnaminster and was encouraged by Bishop Æthelwold.<sup>50</sup> However, the prestige of kings can only have been enhanced by these saintly relatives and presumably they often played a significant role in the promotion of their cults as Æthelred seems to have done with that of his half-sister Edith.<sup>51</sup> The position of saintly intercessor was one which would accord particularly well with the Anglo-Saxon view of the role of royal women which often in the secular world was that of 'peace-weaver', the princess who through a marriage could unite two opposing families and bring an end to feud. Marriage to the Heavenly Bridegroom would enable the royal nun or saint to do something similar in a different sphere and intervene on behalf of the souls of her male kin. Nunneries might be particularly concerned with the care of the royal dead.<sup>52</sup> Some of the texts of the Mildrith Legend clearly say that Minster-in-Thanel was founded as compensation to the kin of the murdered princes.<sup>53</sup> The nuns of the foundation would have been able to pray not only for the souls of the murdered men, but also for those of the men who murdered them.<sup>54</sup> In the tenth century the nunnery of Shaftesbury was chosen as the place where the cult of the murdered Edward the Martyr could be promoted and the sin of his murder be neutralised.<sup>55</sup>

The importance of royal patronage has various implications for the history of Anglo-Saxon nunneries and may help us to understand what happened to the southern nunneries in the ninth century. Although the Vikings have often been blamed for the disappearance of religious houses as a result of their raids, it is an explanation that should not be accepted without corroboration.<sup>56</sup> Undoubtedly many of the southern nunneries were affected by the raids particularly the Kentish nunneries all of which, with the exception of Lyminge, were sited on the coast or at the heads of waterways in order to benefit from trade and tolls. The island of Sheppey on which there was a nunnery was raided in 835, and in 855 was used as a winter base by a Viking fleet.<sup>57</sup> Minster-in-Thanel was similarly exposed, and the nuns appear to have retreated first to the nunnery at Lyminge and then to a refuge in Canterbury.<sup>58</sup> Wareham had similar problems, and although defended by bank and palisade was taken by the Vikings and used as a base in the 870s.<sup>59</sup> Such events would certainly have affected the way of life in the nunneries, but need not have led to their disappearance. The Vikings did not settle on church lands in Kent or Wessex in the

way that they undoubtedly did in eastern England and, as numerous examples from Francia show, a monastery could recover from the severest Viking attacks within a few years if the will existed to refound it and the foundation retained its rights to the lands.<sup>60</sup> The problem in southern England was that neither of those preconditions existed. Charters make it clear that many of the lands which had formerly belonged to the Kentish nunneries were part of the royal *fisc* of the West Saxon kings in the later Saxon period.<sup>61</sup> The West Saxon kings had no interest in maintaining nunneries in the former kingdom of Kent.

What is perhaps more surprising is that the West Saxon kings were not concerned to keep up the nunneries which had been founded in Wessex either, but family politics may provide an explanation here. We do not know exactly what happened to the nunnery at Wimborne, but there are two pieces of evidence which suggest that it was still in existence at the end of the ninth century. In 871 King Æthelred was buried in the monastery in Wimborne.<sup>62</sup> In 900 Æthelred's son Æthelwold, in rebellion against the arrangements for the succession on Alfred's death, 'rode and seized the residence at Wimborne'.<sup>63</sup> Later in the same annal we read that Æthelwold had abducted a nun during his brief campaign and as Wimborne is the only place where he is known to have been which had a nunnery it is a reasonable assumption that the nun came from there. It has been suggested that the nun may have been a member of the royal house whom Æthelwold wished to marry in order to improve his claim to the throne,<sup>64</sup> or that in removing the nun from the nunnery Æthelwold was asserting his rights over Wimborne and perhaps over the throne (the Chronicle says the nun should have been removed only with the king's permission),<sup>65</sup> and, of course, these two suggestions are not mutually exclusive. However we seek to explain Æthelwold's actions, the incident is of value for suggesting that Wimborne was still a nunnery in 900 and for showing us a reason why Wimborne is not heard of again as a nunnery. Wimborne was clearly very closely associated with the family of King Æthelred who was buried there in 871 and it is understandable that the descendants of Æthelred's brother Alfred who were successful in maintaining the throne for themselves would be anxious to downgrade the assets of their potential rivals. Wareham may have suffered from similar associations with a rival branch of the royal house for it was the burial place of King Beorhtric who died in 802 and was given a

hostile press by Asser on information supplied by King Alfred.<sup>66</sup> However, there is a reference to an Abbess Wulfwyn of Wareham during the reign of King Æthelred II when Wareham was used as the first ecclesiastical burial place of the murdered King Edward the Martyr and so we must allow for the possibility that it continued as a nunnery in the eleventh century.<sup>67</sup>

The disposition of nunneries in the early and late Saxon periods reflects the different spheres of royal patronage in the two periods. The five nunneries founded in Kent in the seventh century reflect the political importance of the kings of Kent at this time and their great wealth. The apparent absence of nunneries in Kent in the later Saxon period is a direct result of the disappearance of the Kentish royal house and the shift in the seat of power which left Kent as an area of marginal importance to the West Saxon kings.<sup>68</sup> The kings of Wessex wanted new nunneries in their heartlands of Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset. Like the Kentish double monasteries the new West Saxon nunneries are a manifestation of political power - a statement of the success of Alfred and Edward the Elder over the Vikings, over former Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and over rivals from within their own royal house. Their preference for founding completely new nunneries in Wessex may perhaps be paralleled by the building of the New Minster in Winchester, which was completed early in the reign of Edward the Elder though it may have had its genesis in the reign of Alfred. One of the prime purposes of the New Minster was to serve as a place of burial for Alfred and his descendants and there seems to have been a conscious rejection of the Old Minster which had served as a place of burial for a number of earlier West Saxon kings and lay only a few yards from the new foundation.<sup>69</sup> The rulers of the new West Saxon dynasty, who were kings of England rather than just kings of Wessex, marked the beginning of a new era by founding new religious houses.<sup>70</sup>

Implicit in much of what we have said is that Anglo-Saxon kings seem to have regarded themselves as the controllers of the nunneries within their kingdoms and that the nunneries only existed at the kings' pleasure. Family rights over land were a problem for the church throughout the Anglo-Saxon period and affected male religious houses as well, but the problem seems to have been particularly acute with nunneries. Even in the tenth century when landholding had become more commonplace for individual members of the nobility, there was a strong belief, also found slightly earlier in the will and

lawcode of Alfred, that bookland should not be permanently alienated from the family.<sup>71</sup> One result of this was restrictions on the terms under which women could hold land. Women could inherit bookland, but often estates granted to them were 'entailed', that is the women might enjoy their profits for life, but on death the estates reverted to their kin and rejoined the family stocks. Such restrictions seem to have applied not only to women in secular life, but also to those who entered convents. If a woman became a nun she might be provided with an estate to support her during her lifetime, but when she died the estate returned to her family and did not become part of the nunnery's endowment. This must be why an estate which King Athelstan granted to his half-sister Eadburga who was a nun in Nunnaminster is not found among the nunnery's holdings in Domesday Book.<sup>72</sup> The estate seems to have returned to the royal stock on Eadburga's death and was granted out again in 956.<sup>73</sup> Several examples of a similar type can be found.<sup>74</sup> In contrast Nunnaminster does seem to have been able to acquire permanent control of another estate through Eadburga's intervention. According to Osbert of Clare's *Life* Eadburga persuaded her father Edward the Elder to let the nunnery have an estate which had been forfeited to the king as the punishment for a crime.<sup>75</sup> Presumably an estate acquired in such a way was not subject to the same restrictions as inherited land.

It may only have been after the reforms of Edgar's reign that the concept of land going to the nunnery as an institution rather than for the endowment of individual nuns became at all widespread. Grants to individual female religious which are quite a feature of the reigns of Edmund and Eadred are not found after the reign of Edgar. Queen Ælfthryth and Abbess Wulfthryh were both concerned to get charters from King Æthelred confirming that land they wished to give to their foundations of Wherwell and Wilton respectively was their own and was to be granted in perpetuity.<sup>76</sup> Their actions both show their desire to make permanent provision for the institutions and their awareness that what they were trying to do might be challenged. An addition to Æthelwold's account of the reforms of Edgar's reign shows the same appreciation of the pressures to which nunneries were subject:

'We also instruct abbesses to be deeply loyal and to serve the precepts of the holy rule with all their hearts, and to enjoin the commands of God Almighty, so that none of them shall presume senselessly to give God's estates either to kinsmen or secular grand

persons, neither for money nor flattery.<sup>77</sup>

The close links between nunneries and the royal houses mean that there were many common features between the foundations throughout the Anglo-Saxon period because similar demands and restrictions continued to be placed upon nunneries. It therefore remains to be asked whether there really were significant organisational differences between the nunneries of different periods. The early nunneries were, of course, double monasteries and based on similar foundations in Francia where Kentish princesses had become nuns before there were any nunneries within Kent.<sup>78</sup> Anyone familiar with the laws of the western church and practices elsewhere would have found the double monastery an irregular institution. Archbishop Theodore observed in his Penitential: 'It is not permissible for men to be with monastic women, nor women with men; nevertheless we shall not overthrow that which is the custom in this region.'<sup>79</sup> The double monastery seems to have suited the needs of early Germanic kingdoms in the west where the idea of leaving a household of women without male protection might have appeared even more unwise and scandalous. The men in the double monasteries could perform many necessary functions for the sisters, not the least being the essential function of priest. But one should not forget that one of the major reasons for the presence of the men was to fulfil parochial duties, for the double monasteries were not simply monastic institutions but minsters responsible for the conversion and spiritual needs of a large dependent parish.<sup>80</sup> The males of the double monasteries were not necessarily monks and Wimborne is described as possessing a *monasterium clericorum* whose inmates seem to have had little contact with any of the females apart from the abbess.<sup>81</sup> The double monastery at Lyminge possessed its own *presbyter abbas* as early as 689.<sup>82</sup> A clear distinction may have been drawn between the double monasteries' dual functions of nunnery and minster church from the start, and where it was not the position may have been reformed before the period of Viking attacks. Professor Brooks has demonstrated the concern of archbishops of Canterbury in the late eighth and early ninth centuries to establish episcopal control over the clergy of minsters with parochial functions, and they seem to have met with a fair degree of success until affected by the changing political situation.<sup>83</sup>

The new nunneries of the ninth and tenth centuries were fitted into

a pre-existing pattern of minster parishes and were all founded in places that possessed head minsters. The churches of minster and nunnery were likely to be close together, as at Winchester where the estate of Nunnaminster abutted those of two male foundations of secular clergy,<sup>84</sup> or minster clergy and nuns might share the same church as seems to have happened at Romsey and Wherwell.<sup>85</sup> The secular clergy could be intimately involved in the affairs of the nunneries and *vice versa*. Queen Ælfthryth's expulsion of Abbess Wulfhild of Barking is said to have been made with the assistance of the priests of Barking,<sup>86</sup> and Abbess Wulfthryth of Wilton appeared after her death to protect priests of Wilton who had been imprisoned by a royal reeve.<sup>87</sup> It is possible that the arrangements which are recorded after the Norman Conquest for prebendaries attached to the churches of the nunneries may preserve arrangements which date from the late Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>88</sup> As in the earlier Anglo-Saxon period the functions of nunnery and minster church do not always seem to have been sharply distinguished.

There were additional irregularities in the provision for religious women in the ninth and tenth centuries. The Aachen reform councils of 816-9 had allowed a distinction between nuns who followed the precepts of the Benedictine Rule and canonesses who lived according to an ameliorated form of the Rule and were allowed to retain private property.<sup>89</sup> Something of this distinction was observed in tenth-century England and is acknowledged by William of Malmesbury in the contrast he drew between two daughters of Edward the Elder who 'vowing celibacy to God renounced the pleasure of earthly nuptials: Ælfflaeda in a religious and Æthelhilda in a lay habit'.<sup>90</sup> However, the distinction does not seem to be quite what Benedict of Aniane had in mind. In England both nuns and vowesses (as the second group was often known) could retain private estates, as we have seen, and the difference between the two groups seems to have been that nuns lived in a community whereas the vowesses were allowed to live on their own estates.<sup>91</sup> Royal and ecclesiastical legislation was sufficiently respected by the later Saxon period to permit widows who took a vow of chastity (so that they would not be forced by kinsmen to remarry) to live independently on their own lands rather than having to band together in nunneries as seems to have generally happened in the seventh and eighth centuries.

Some of these religious women chose to live in close proximity to male religious communities. One of the best recorded examples is

Æthelflaeda who was related both to King Athelstan and to a powerful West Country family which included Dunstan amongst its members. Æthelflaeda had apparently taken a religious vow and lived in a house in Glastonbury where many of her male kin were members of the monastery and in which she was visited on occasion by her kinsman King Athelstan.<sup>92</sup> A number of the grants to religious women that were noted before were of estates in the proximity of male religious communities and the estates later came into the possession of these male houses.<sup>93</sup> One of the attractions of the double monasteries may have been that they allowed male and female relatives to live together in the same institution. The same desire seems to have existed in the tenth century, but to have been met in a different way through vowesses associating themselves with male communities. This might be different in kind from what had happened earlier, but not dissimilar in effect and hardly more in keeping with the expectations of the church.

Some attempt was made to regularise female monastic life during the reforms of the reign of Edgar. The provisions of the *Regularis Concordia* were to apply to the nunneries as well as to the monasteries and Bishop Æthelwold made a translation of the Rule of St Benedict into Old English specifically for use in nunneries.<sup>94</sup> Æthelwold reorganised the estates of the religious communities in Winchester with the result that the Nunnaminster was strictly enclosed by a wall and separated both from the male minsters (which now became monasteries) and from the everyday life of the town.<sup>95</sup> As we have seen, the nunneries were encouraged to develop more of a corporate consciousness and to seek endowments to the institution rather than to individual nuns. Æthelwold was the only one of the reforming bishops to concern himself with nunneries - but then he may also have been the only one to have had nunneries within his diocese. Queen Ælfthryth's two new foundations at Amesbury and Wherwell were probably made with his assistance,<sup>96</sup> but Æthelwold's main preoccupation was with re-establishing monasteries and eliminating communities of secular clerks. He was very keen to refound monasteries which had existed in the time of Bede, but made no attempt to restore earlier nunneries; indeed, one of his refoundations was Ely which had been a double monastery, but was refounded as a male community.<sup>97</sup>

It is difficult to know how far the nunneries were actually affected by the tenth-century reforms. We do not really have the right



information to make the assessment. The grants to individual women religious disappear, but there is evidence from the eleventh and early twelfth centuries that vowed women were still living in close proximity to male communities.<sup>98</sup> When a church was built for the nuns of Shaftesbury on their estate in Bradford-on-Avon to provide a refuge during the Viking attacks of Æthelred II's reign it seems to have been built directly opposite the minster church and nuns and priests would have been in close proximity.<sup>99</sup> The Life of St Edith certainly does not suggest that she was unduly affected by a vow of poverty. She seems to have had plenty of money to spend on building projects, gold embroidery and her menagerie of wild animals. Nor was she strictly secluded from men as she had two male tutors. Nunneries continued to be regarded as the special preserve of the royal house. Wherwell which had been founded by Queen Ælfhryth was ruled by her granddaughter during the reign of Edward the Confessor.<sup>100</sup> Edward's Norman successors did not continue the special relationship between the royal house and the West Saxon nunneries though surviving female members of the West Saxon royal house continued to patronise them.<sup>101</sup>

Anglo-Saxon nunneries were not a simple female equivalent of male monastic communities. This was not just because the church did not allow the same spheres of activity to male and female religious, but because men and women were treated differently in secular life as well. A notable feature of the Anglo-Saxon social and legal system was that women were regarded as the responsibility of their male kinsmen. A woman did not possess full legal status and her male kinsmen preserved a proprietary interest in her even after her marriage. Although the introduction of Christianity and social developments led to some modifications during the course of the Anglo-Saxon period, the basic principles remained and were apparent to compilers of Anglo-Saxon custom in the reign of Henry I.<sup>102</sup> The proprietary interests of male kinsmen also seem to have prevailed even when their female kinswomen took monastic vows. The church had an uphill battle in trying to break the tendency of Anglo-Saxon families to claim control of the estates, and sometimes even whole foundations, associated with male members who had gone into the church.<sup>103</sup> The task of getting them to renounce control over female members, who were subject to more vigorous 'ownership' by their families, must have been correspondingly more formidable.

In addition, Anglo-Saxon nunneries were peculiarly royal

institutions and, although most of their inmates must have come from noble families, the nunneries appear to us most frequently in the surviving sources in the context of their relationship with the royal house. The proprietary rights of the royal house provide a common link between the nunneries founded at different times and places during the pre-Conquest period in southern England. Arguably the similarities are more striking than the differences and reflect a continuity in the expectations of the functions nunneries would perform for their royal houses. Reforms within the church had a limited and sometimes rather distorted effect on the way of life in the nunneries. Even Bishop Æthelwold, the sternest of the reformers who persuaded and bullied kings and other landowners to renounce proprietary claims to churchlands, seems to have had limited objectives where nunneries were concerned. It would take a far greater tenurial revolution than Æthelwold could bring about to end the traditional, and unusually close, links between the royal families of Anglo-Saxon England and the religious foundations which housed so many of their kinswomen.<sup>104</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> M. Bateson, 'Origin and early history of double monasteries', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 13, 1899, 137-98; J. Godfrey, 'The double monastery in early English history', *Ampleforth Journal*, 79 1974, 19-32. However, there do also seem to have been some 'twin' foundations, notably those of John of Beverley and Earconwald of Chertsey, where a monastery and nunnery were regarded as joint foundations, but on separate sites.

<sup>2</sup> M.A. Meyer, 'Women and the tenth-century English monastic reform', *Revue Bénédictine* 87, 1977, 34-61, and 'Patronage of the West Saxon royal nunneries in late Anglo-Saxon England', *Revue Bénédictine* 91, 1981, 332-58.

<sup>3</sup> J.T. Schulenburg, 'Strict active enclosure and its effects on the female monastic experience (ca. 500-1100)', *Medieval Religious Women I, Distant Echoes*, ed. J.A. Nichols and L.Y. Shank, Kalamazoo 1984, pp.51-86. For a good general survey of current views see C. Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, London 1984, pp.109-28.

<sup>4</sup> *Regularis Concordia Anglica nationis monachorum sanctimonialiumque*, ed. T. Symons, London 1953.

<sup>5</sup> There undoubtedly was at least one nunnery in the kingdom of the South Saxons, but not enough is known about it to include it in this discussion; P.H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters. An Annotated List and*

*Bibliography*, London 1968, no. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Hoo seems to have been founded by Caedwalla of Wessex and subsequently granted to the monastery of Medehamstede. It was later linked with Werburga, daughter of King Wulfhere of Mercia and Eormenhild, a Kentish princess: F.M. Stenton, 'Medehamstede and its colonies', *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D.M. Stenton, Oxford 1970, pp.179-92 (189-90); G. Ward, 'The forgotten nunnery of Saint Werberg at Hoo', *Archaeologia Cantiana* 47, 1935, 117-25. For the other houses see below n.7.

<sup>7</sup> D. Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend. A Study of Early Medieval Hagiography*, Leicester 1982.

<sup>8</sup> Sawyer, no. 20. Four abbesses are named in the privilege which can be accepted as genuine; N. Brooks, 'The development of military obligations in eighth- and ninth-century England', *England Before the Conquest*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes, Cambridge 1971, pp.69-84 (75). A subsequent forgery (Sawyer no. 22) which was in existence by the early ninth century and was based on the privilege names five abbesses and the five nunneries we have already mentioned; N. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, Leicester 1984, pp.191-7.

<sup>9</sup> Sawyer, nos. 10-15, 17-19, 21, 23-4, 26, 29, 39.

<sup>10</sup> See nn. 35 and 36.

<sup>11</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle sub anno* 718.

<sup>12</sup> Rudolf of Fulda, *Vita S. Leobae*, *MGH Scriptores* XV (i), ed. G. Waitz, Hanover 1887.

<sup>13</sup> *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, *MGH Epistolae Selectae* 1, ed. M. Tangl, Berlin 1955, no. 29. In this letter Leoba refers to a period of study under Eadburga and it has been conjectured from this that Leoba was for a while at the nunnery of Minster-in-Thanet under Abbess Eadburga who was also one of Boniface's correspondents and a particularly learned woman. However, this identification cannot be regarded as definite.

<sup>14</sup> *Aldhelm; The Poetic Works*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge and J. Rosier, Woodbridge 1985, pp.40-9. An epitaph to Bugga survives: M. Lapidge, 'Some remnants of Bede's lost "Liber Epigrammatum"', *English Historical Review* 90, 1975, 798-820 (815-6).

<sup>15</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle sub anno* 786 and *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. W.H. Stevenson, Oxford 1904 (revised ed. 1959), ch. 49. It is possible that Wareham was the nunnery founded by Bugga. The churches have the same dedication and Wimborne and Wareham are the only two prestigious nunneries known from Wessex in which there were royal burials before 900. It is very unlikely that Bugga's

monastery was at Withington (Gloucs) (as suggested in Lapidge, 'Liber', 815-6) as Withington was associated with the Hwiccan royal house.

<sup>16</sup> Bateson, p.181.

<sup>17</sup> Asser, ch.98.

<sup>18</sup> *Liber Vitae: Register and Martyrology of New Minster and Hyde Abbey, Winchester*, ed. W. de Gray Birch, Hampshire Record Society, London and Winchester 1892, p.5.

<sup>19</sup> *Florentii Wigorniensis Monachi Chronicon ex Chronicis*, I, 141, ed. B. Thorpe, London 1848, and *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis Monachi De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, I, 137, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series 1887. A fifteenth-century poem claims that Wilton was first founded in the reign of Egbert and subsequently refounded by Alfred, but this can hardly be seen as a reliable source; E. Crittal, 'Abbey of Wilton', *Victoria County History for Wiltshire*, 6, 1956, pp.231-41.

<sup>20</sup> Meyer, 'Women', pp.51-61, though the author mistakenly calls the queen 'Æthelthryth'.

<sup>21</sup> Meyer, 'Patronage'.

<sup>22</sup> A. Wilmart, 'La légende de Sainte Édith en prose et vers par le moine Goscelin', *Analecta Bollandiana* 32, 1913, 5-101 and 56, 1938, 265-307; M. Esposito, 'La vie de Saint Wulfilda par Goscelin de Cantorbéry', *Analecta Bollandiana* 32, 1913, 10-26.

<sup>23</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Laud. Misc. 114, ff. 85-1250 (an edition is being prepared by Dr Susan Ridyard). For other accounts of her life see L. Braswell, 'Saint Edburga of Winchester: a study of her cult, a.d. 950-1500, with an edition of the fourteenth-century Middle English and Latin lives', *Medieval Studies* 33, 1971, 292-333.

<sup>24</sup> S. Millinger, 'Humility and power: Anglo-Saxon nuns in Anglo-Norman hagiography', *Distant Echoes*, pp.115-29.

<sup>25</sup> Sawyer, no.20.

<sup>26</sup> *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, ed. F.L. Attenborough, Cambridge 1922, pp.24-31 (ch.1.1).

<sup>27</sup> Tangl, no.14.

<sup>28</sup> Brooks, *Canterbury*, pp.175-97.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.197-206.

<sup>30</sup> Attenborough, pp.68-9 (8).

<sup>31</sup> *Regularis Concordia*, ch.3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* ch.7; see the Life of Wulfhild (n.22). Edgar was not alone in this interest in nuns and it has been suggested that the irregular use a number of Anglo-Saxon kings made of nunneries could be connected

with royal claims of lordship over nunneries; M. Clunies Ross, 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', *Past and Present* 108, 1985, 3-34 (31-2).

<sup>33</sup> *Vita Wulfhildae*, pp.17-21.

<sup>34</sup> Rollason, pp.9-13. Domne Eafe of the Legend is presumably to be equated with Abbess Æbbe of the earliest Minster charters. However, it is unlikely that Domne Eafe/Æbbe is to be identified with Eormenburga who married Merewalh of the Magonsætan and was the mother of Mildrith as some of the versions of the Legend claim. Both women apparently appear in the grant of privileges from King Wihtred (Sawyer no.20).

<sup>35</sup> Rollason, pp.35-6; Tangl, nos.30 and 35; see also, Brooks, *Canterbury*, p.201.

<sup>36</sup> Tangl, no.105 makes it clear that Hæaburg was related to King Æthelred II of Kent. K.P. Witney, 'The Kentish royal saints: an enquiry into the facts behind the legends', *Archaeologia Cantiana* 101, 1984, 1-22 makes further suggestions about their descent. However, Eadburga of Minster-in-Thamet cannot have been the same person as Hæaburg *cognomento* Bugga who appears in Tangl, nos.14, 27, 94 and 105 as he claims; their separate names are clearly identified and Eadburga never seems to have been addressed as Bugga. There is also no reliable information to support the idea that either of these Kentish abbesses was the same person as the princess Bugga of Aldhelm's poem and the chronology of all three abbess's lives, where it can be reconstructed, is against it. The name-element *-burga* from which the form 'Bugga' derives was extremely common in the seventh and eighth centuries and the temptation must be resisted of turning all the royal abbesses with this name-element into the same person. Many of these problems in identification can be traced back to Bateson, pp.178-9. See also n.15.

<sup>37</sup> Tangl, no.14.

<sup>38</sup> *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell, London 1962, p.54.

<sup>39</sup> D. Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, Cambridge 1930, no.3, pp.10-15, 108-14. See also H.P.R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of Wessex*, Leicester 1964, no.71, p.44.

<sup>40</sup> *Vita Wulfhildae*, pp.20-1.

<sup>41</sup> Millinger, pp.117-18.

<sup>42</sup> *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge and M. Herren, Woodbridge 1979.

<sup>43</sup> P. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers. The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages*, London 1983, pp.175-90.

<sup>44</sup> A.L. Klinck, 'Anglo-Saxon women and the law', *Journal of Medieval History* 8, 1982, 107-22 (110-11).

- <sup>45</sup> Stafford, pp.175-90.
- <sup>46</sup> F. Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, London 1970, 115-17.
- <sup>47</sup> The *topos* appears in the lives of Eadburga of Nunnaminster and Edith of Wilton.
- <sup>48</sup> Meyer, 'Patronage', p.333, n.3.
- <sup>49</sup> *Maxims* I, 11. 63b-65, from *The Exeter Book*, ed. G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie, New York 1936, p.159, as cited in Ross, p.9.
- <sup>50</sup> Rollason, pp.33-40; Braswell, pp.292-324.
- <sup>51</sup> See the events surrounding her translation in ch.1 of *Translatio Edithae* (Wilmart 1938).
- <sup>52</sup> Stafford, pp.120-7.
- <sup>53</sup> Rollason, pp.41-51.
- <sup>54</sup> Bede says that this was the intention behind the foundation of the monastery of Gilling in Yorkshire which Oswiu handed over to the kin of Oswine of Deira whom he had murdered; *Historia Ecclesiastica* III, 14. See also D. Rollason, 'The cults of murdered royal saints in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 11, 1983, 1-22.
- <sup>55</sup> S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'The Unready' 978-1016*, Cambridge 1980, pp.163-76.
- <sup>56</sup> R. Fleming, 'Monastic lands and England's defence in the Viking age', *English Historical Review*, 100, 1985, 247-65.
- <sup>57</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle sub annis*.
- <sup>58</sup> Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, pp.21-4; Brooks, *Canterbury*, pp.34-5, 201.
- <sup>59</sup> Asser, ch.49.
- <sup>60</sup> See, for instance, J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, Oxford, 1983, pp.300-89.
- <sup>61</sup> Brooks, *Canterbury*, pp.203-6.
- <sup>62</sup> Asser, ch.41. Asser uses the word *monasterium* which could have the more general meaning of 'minster' which is used in some texts of the Chronicle. However, Æthelweard, who was descended from King Æthelred I, specifically says that he was buried *in cenobio quod Vuinburnan nuncupatur*; *Chronicle of Æthelweard*, p.39.
- <sup>63</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle sub anno* 900.
- <sup>64</sup> P. Stafford, 'Sons and mothers: family politics in the early middle ages', *Medieval Women*, ed. D. Baker, Oxford 1978, p.97.
- <sup>65</sup> Ross, p.32.
- <sup>66</sup> Asser, ch.14-15.
- <sup>67</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle C sub anno* 982 (Wulfwyn) and D 979

(burial of Edward).

<sup>68</sup> However, there is a reference to Abbess Leofrun of St Mildred's who was captured by the Danes in Canterbury in 1011 to suggest some provision for women religious in Kent in the later Saxon period; Brooks, *Canterbury*, pp.34-5.

<sup>69</sup> B.A.E. Yorke, 'The bishops of Winchester, the kings of Wessex and the development of Winchester in the ninth and early tenth centuries', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society* 40, 1984, 61-70.

<sup>70</sup> See also Æthelflaed's New Minster in Gloucester; A Thacker, 'Chester and Gloucester: early ecclesiastical organization in the two Mercian burhs', *Northern History* 18, 1982, 199-211.

<sup>71</sup> *Alfred the Great*, ed. and trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, Harmondsworth 1983, pp.168, 178, 324-66.

<sup>72</sup> Sawyer, no.446.

<sup>73</sup> Sawyer, no.600.

<sup>74</sup> *The Historia Brittonum*; vol. 3. *The 'Vatican' Recension*, ed. D.N. Dumville, Woodbridge 1985, pp.14-15.

<sup>75</sup> *Vita S. Eadburgae*, ch.7.

<sup>76</sup> Meyer, 'Women', 57-8 and 'Patronage', 353-4.

<sup>77</sup> *English Historical Documents*, vol.I, c.500-1042, ed. D. Whitelock, 2nd ed., London 1979, pp.922-3.

<sup>78</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica* III, 8.

<sup>79</sup> *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 3, 195 (ch.6, 8), ed. A.W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, Oxford 1871.

<sup>80</sup> M. Deanesly, 'English and Gallic minsters', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4th series, 23, 1941, 25-69; J. Godfrey, 'The place of the double monastery in the Anglo-Saxon minster system', *Famulus Christi*, ed. G. Bonner, London 1976, pp.344-50.

<sup>81</sup> *Vita S. Leobae*, ch.12.

<sup>82</sup> Brooks, *Canterbury*, pp.187-8.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.187-91.

<sup>84</sup> M. Biddle, 'Felix Urbs Winthonia: Winchester in the age of monastic reform', *Tenth-Century Studies*, ed. D. Parsons, Chichester 1975, pp.123-40.

<sup>85</sup> P.H. Hase, 'The mother churches of Hampshire', *Minsters and Parish Churches. The Local Church in Transition, 950-1200*, ed. J. Blair, Oxford 1988, pp.45-66(46).



<sup>86</sup> Meyer, 'Women', 54-5.

<sup>87</sup> Millinger, 121.

<sup>88</sup> Hase, p.62, n.23. For analogous arrangements in the Ottonian empire see K. Leyser, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society: Ottonian Saxony*, London 1979, pp.63-73.

<sup>89</sup> S.F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500-900*, Philadelphia 1985, pp.127-88.

<sup>90</sup> *Gesta Regum* I, 137.

<sup>91</sup> J.L. André, 'Widows and vowesses', *Archaeological Journal* 49, 1892, 69-82. In Æthelred's lawcode of 1008 (ch.4.1) the vowesses ('women devoted to God') are equated with the secular priests and a rather similar distinction seems to have been known in Ottonian Germany; Leyser, pp.63-73. For a good example of a wealthy vowess see the will of Wynflaed; Whitelock, *Wills*, no.3.

<sup>92</sup> *Memorials of St Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series 1874, pp.17-18.

<sup>93</sup> For example, Sawyer nos.482 (Abingdon), 517 (Barking), 535 (Christ Church, Canterbury) and 563 (Glastonbury).

<sup>94</sup> M. Gretsch, 'Æthelwold's translation of the *Regula Sancti Benedicti* and its Latin exemplar', *Anglo-Saxon England* 3, 1974, pp.125-51.

<sup>95</sup> Biddle, pp.132-9.

<sup>96</sup> Meyer, 'Women', 51-61.

<sup>97</sup> *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. B.A.E. Yorke, Woodbridge 1988, *passim*.

<sup>98</sup> S. Thompson, 'Why English nunneries had no history: a study of the problems of the English nunneries founded after the Conquest', *Distant Echoes*, pp.131-49 (142).

<sup>99</sup> H.M. Taylor, 'The Anglo-Saxon church at Bradford-on-Avon', *Archaeological Journal* 130, 1973, 141-71; R. Gem, 'Church architecture in the reign of King Ethelred', *Ethelred the Unready*, ed. D. Hill, Oxford 1978, pp.105-14.

<sup>100</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E *sub anno* 1051. The abbess was King Edward's sister.

<sup>101</sup> D. Baker, '"A nursery of saints": St Margaret of Scotland reconsidered', *Medieval Women*, Oxford 1978, 119-41 (122-5).

<sup>102</sup> Klinck, 107-19; Ross, 3-34.

<sup>103</sup> See, for instance, E. John, 'The king and the monks in the tenth-century reformation', *Orbis Britanniae*, Leicester 1966, 154-80.

<sup>104</sup> I would like to thank Dr Pauline Stafford for her help and encouragement in the writing of this paper.