

4 The Anglo-Saxon Minster Churches and their Fate

There is now a generally accepted view of the process by which England acquired its rural churches.¹ Kings, and bishops under their patronage, founded churches of a public character in important administrative centres. By the mid 8th century, all or most of the English kingdoms had established a network of minster *parochiae*, typically covering between perhaps five and fifteen modern parishes and served by groups of itinerating priests from the central church.

The main theme of parochial history in the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries is the decline of the minsters as more and more secular lords built manorial churches under their own control. By the time of Domesday Book this process was far advanced, and the late 11th century marks the high point of lay power over churches. The next century saw a redefinition of parochial rights, so that by 1200 the late Saxon and early Norman 'ownership' of churches had been reduced to little more than a *ius presentandi*.²

Although valid in general, this framework ignores some important issues. What factors determined the varying fates of mother churches, between the extremes of revitalisation as reformed monasteries on the one hand and total extinction on the other? Were parish churches always the private foundations of laymen, in rivalry with the minster clergy, or were they sometimes established with their consent as out-stations of the mother church? How far did minsters still exercise a restrictive influence on church foundation after 1066? How did the creation of local churches affect habits of worship in rural society?

In his meticulous analysis of provisions in canon law and the English royal codes relating to church ownership, P H Hase shows the vigilance with which, in theory at least, the monopoly of established churches over ecclesiastical revenue was guarded. Canonists strenuously denied the power of a founding lord to divert tithe to his own church or take over existing rights, and the compromises which the Church was in practice forced to accept remained hedged around with restrictions. In a celebrated law of 961 × 3 (Eadgar II.2, repeated Cnut I.12) a thegn was allowed to divert one-third only of his demesne tithe to an estate church with a graveyard. In a weaker position than his Frankish or German counterpart, the English proprietor was obliged to buy off the rights of the mother church with a lump sum or, more frequently, a recurring pension. Through the innate conservatism of ecclesiastical authority, the memory of such arrangements often survived into a better-recorded age in the form of 'evidence of one parish church receiving income, or performing profitable duties, in the parish of another. No matter how late such evidence is, it is almost invariably the case that one can read back from it to the period when the first parish church was a mother church, and the second a church newly founded within its parochia.'³

Thus the retrospective evidence of pensions, mortuaries, tithe-divisions and the relationships of dependence between one church and another reveals the growth of a system of rights. At the same time, the meagre written record can be supplemented by viewing churches in the geographical, economic and tenurial setting in which they developed. This and the two following chapters will adopt these approaches as a means of setting the churches in their social context and inferring facts about their pastoral functions.

Hase's work on Hampshire casts doubt on the accepted view that private, 'encroaching' churches were pre-eminent in transforming the rural Church: in that county, daughter churches were at least sometimes served by visiting minster priests. The comparable cases of Thatcham

(Berkshire) and Berkeley Herness (Gloucestershire), where mother churches retained limited and ill-defined rights over a proportion of their former chapelries, had already been examined by B R Kemp; in neither case do any of the dependants bear the stamp of private lay foundations.⁴ In its emphasis on the continuing influence of old minsters into the 11th and 12th centuries, this recent work reacts against the view, implicit in earlier studies, that south-eastern England was fully parochialised by 1086.⁵

The overall picture remains confused, and can only be clarified by more local studies. Hase suggests that his conclusions are generally valid for southern England; but there are factors, as he acknowledges, which might make Hampshire atypical.⁶ In Surrey, the remoter and humbler archdeaconry of the same diocese, implications drawn from the Hampshire evidence may usefully be reconsidered.

The evidence

'That there were such churches in Surrey is certain; where they were is a matter of conjecture', wrote H E Malden in discussing the Anglo-Saxon minster system.⁷ While this now seems over-pessimistic, it remains true that the evidence is isolated, incomplete and mostly late, dating from a time when the minsters had already lost much of their importance. And Surrey is singularly deficient, apart from certain specific cases, in the retrospective evidence of burial rights, tithe-portions and the like, showing in this respect a striking contrast to Hampshire.⁸

The patchiness of the evidence will be only too apparent from the discussion which follows. Four minsters are recorded at a very early date, but institutional continuity from the mid-Saxon period onwards can only be glimpsed in the special case of Chertsey Abbey. The other three (Bermondsey, Farnham and Woking) appear in 7th- and 8th-century sources, but survival through the vicissitudes of the 9th and 10th centuries and identity with the Domesday churches cannot be proved. Tenth-century sources give explicit references to two others (Kingston and Godstone) and mention a priest at another likely minster centre (Croydon). Kingston has part of an 8th-century cross-shaft, and Godalming two 9th-century sculpture fragments. Otherwise we have nothing before the indirect and cryptic evidence of Domesday Book, supplemented by general considerations and hints from later material.

The work of the last twenty years makes it possible to accept Domesday terminology with more confidence as evidence for former minsters. In counties where the commissioners recorded churches at all, any description more elaborate than the ubiquitous *ibi ecclesia* or *ibi presbyter* seems generally a mark of superior status.⁹ For Surrey it is encouraging that such descriptions correspond well with other evidence in suggesting likely candidates. In view of their terminological importance, the Domesday entries for all churches where the question of minster status arises are worth quoting in full:

BERMONDSEY (King): 'Ibi nova et pulchra aeclesia'. (30b (I.4))

CHERTSEY (Chertsey Abbey): 'Ipsa abbatia iacet in Godelei hundredo . . .' (32d (VIII.18))

CROYDON (Archbishop of Canterbury): 'Ibi aeclesia'. (30d (II.1))

FARNHAM (Bishop of Winchester): 'Aecclesiam huius manerii tenet de episcopo Osbernus de Ow. Valet 6 libras, cum una hida quam habet in Hantesira'. (31a (III.1))

GODALMING (King): 'Rannulfus Flanbard tenet de hoc manerio aeccliam, cui pertinet 3 hidae. Ulmaerus tenuit de rege E. Nunquam geldum reddidit . . . Ibidem tenet isdem Rannulfus alteram aeccliam quae reddit 12 solidos per anum'. (30d (I.14))

GODSTONE (Count Eustace): [No church mentioned.] (34b (XV.2))

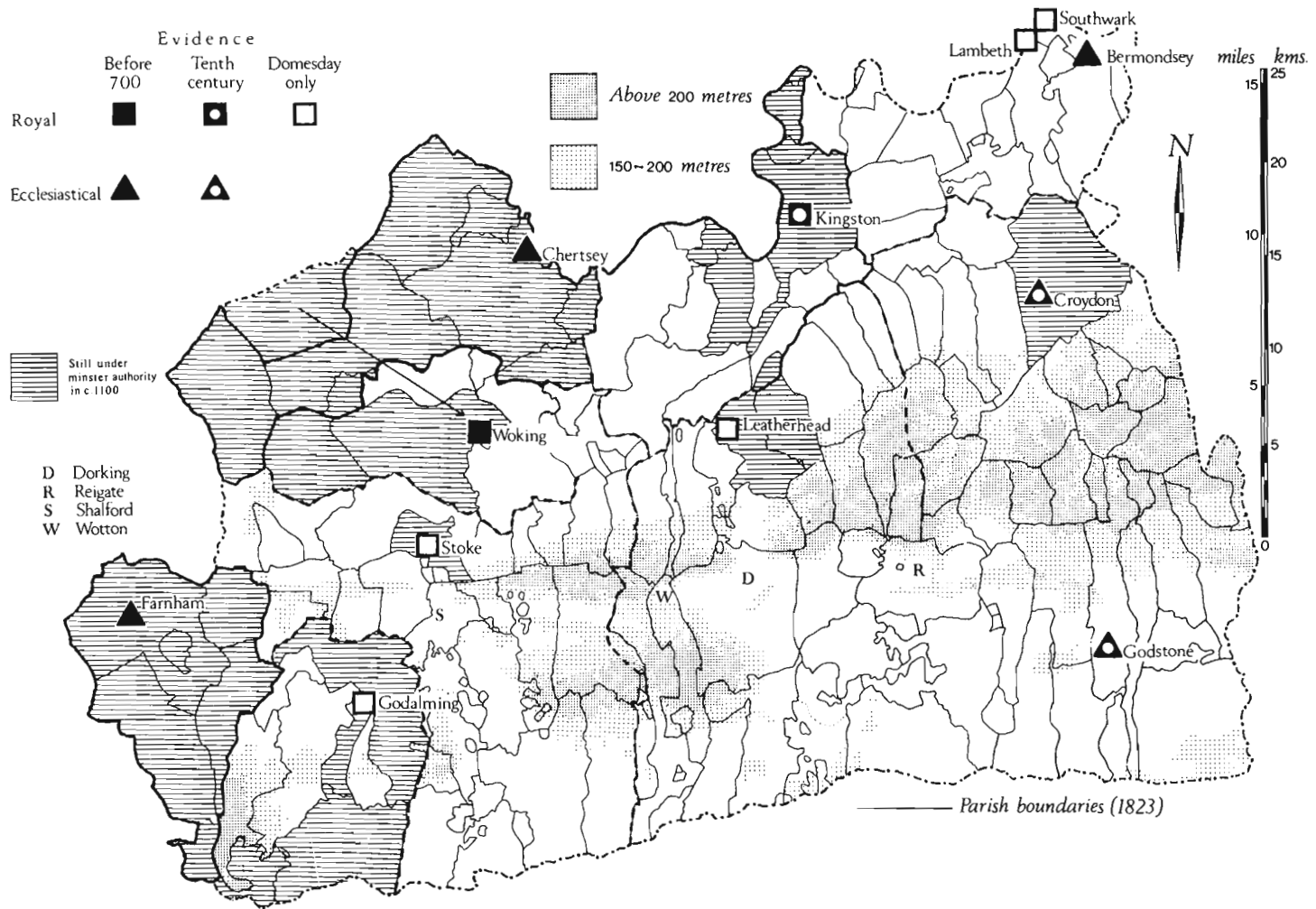


Fig 25 The Anglo-Saxon minster churches and their *parochiae*

KINGSTON (King): 'Ibi aecclesia'. (30c (I.8))

LAMBETH (Lambeth church): 'Terra aecclesiae de Lanchei . . . : Sancta Maria manerium est quod Lanchei vocatur. Goda comitissa tenuit, soror R.E. . . . Ibi aecclesia . . . De isto manerio habet episcopus Baiocensis unam culturam terrae, quae ante et post mortem Godae iacuit in ista aecclesia'. (34a–b (XIV.1))

LEATHERHEAD (King; after entry for the royal manor of Ewell): 'Ad hoc manerium adiacet aecclesia de Leret cum 40 acris terrae. Valet 20 solidos. Osbernus de Ow tenet'. (30c (I.9))

SOUTHWARK (Bishop of Bayeux): 'Ipse episcopus habet in Sudwerche unum monasterium et unum aqne fluctum. Rex E. tenebat die qua mortuus fuit. Qui aecclesiam habebat de rege tenebat'. (32a (V.28))

STOKE BY GUILDFORD (King): 'Ibi aecclesia, quam Willelmus tenet de rege cum dimidia hida in elemosina'. (30b (I.3))

WOKING (King): 'Ibi aecclesia. Osbernus tenet'. (30a (I.2))

There is no uniformity about this list. In one entry the word *monasterium* is used, while most of the churches fulfil at least some of the conditions of being 'listed individually, with the names of the successive holders, a description of the holding, and a statement of its liabilities and value'.¹⁰ Others are simpler: the ancient coronation church at Kingston has a plain *ibi aecclesia*, while only the addition of a tenant's name marks Woking as superior. Certainly we cannot argue from silence; Godstone minster, known from one earlier reference, is unmentioned in Domesday Book, and the same may apply to otherwise unknown minsters. Likewise, the distinction between mother church and local church is not quite so clear-cut as most writers have assumed; a few wealthy and long-established estate churches display, on a smaller scale, characteristics otherwise peculiar to old minsters (below, pp113–14). It can only be said that no Surrey churches beyond those listed above are known to have carried into the 11th and 12th centuries the attributes of major early foundations.

The Domesday and pre-Conquest evidence is deficient in one important respect. Since it scarcely ever mentions the bonds between mother and daughter churches, it wholly fails to indicate the original extent of minster *parochiae* or the degree to which they had been eroded by the 11th century. The historian must work backwards, reconstructing the *parochiae* individually and fitting them into an overall pattern, before he can work forwards again to trace their decline.

Chertsey

The earliest recorded Christian enterprise in Surrey was Bishop Eorcenwold's foundation, in or near 666, of sister monasteries at Barking (Essex) and Chertsey.¹¹ While Ecgbert of Kent was the original patron of Chertsey, the main benefactor was Frithuwold, sub-king of Wulfhere of Mercia.¹² Frithuwold soon afterwards granted a large estate 'ad roborandum idem monasterium quod nuncupatur Cirotesege', and if later forgeries preserve a core of truth the pre-Viking monastery also held more than thirty smaller manors scattered through Surrey (above, pp25, 30–1).¹³ A garbled story in the 13th-century Chertsey Cartulary, taken in conjunction with an entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, suggests that the monastery was sacked by the Vikings in the late 9th century; re-founded in 884, presumably as a secular minster; and finally reformed in 964 when Eadgar expelled the priests and installed monks from Abingdon.¹⁴ In its new guise the monastery maintained that special importance among Thames Valley houses which it had always held thanks to Frithuwold's lavish endowment.¹⁵

The medieval churches and chapels within the main demesne estate (fig 9A) all belonged to the

Abbey, and there is no hint of alien ecclesiastical rights. Clearly the original *parochia* of Chertsey minster covered at least this area, roughly coterminous with Godley hundred, which the monks still held in 1066 and over which they retained complete control. This estate was carved out of a pre-existing secular *regio* based on Woking (above, p14), and it is not impossible that the first Chertsey priests were intended to have pastoral responsibility for the whole territory, not merely for the portion in their own hands.

Woking

There was a tradition in the 12th century that dependencies of *Medeshamstede* (Peterborough) monastery in c690 had included Bermondsey and Woking minsters. This is a late source, but the Peterborough charters include a papal privilege of 708 × 15 addressed to Hædda, abbot of the monasteries founded in the name of St Peter at *Vermundesei* and *Woccbingas*.¹⁶ In c775 × 785 King Offa confirmed to Woking church twenty hides 'in loco in quo illud monasterium situm est', at the request of Pusa abbot of Peterborough and the ealdorman Brorda.¹⁷

There is a reasonable *prima facie* case that this monastery survived, as a secular minster, to be identified with the church on the Domesday royal manor; the present church is in fact dedicated to St Peter. Even in the 13th century its parish was unusually large, including Pirbright as a dependent chapelry (fig 26).¹⁸ More significant, the parochial jurisdiction of Woking church also covered Windlesham, an outlier of Woking manor and hundred cut off by Chertsey land (above, p14). An illuminating verdict given by local jurors in 1233 looks back to events in the reign of Henry II or before for the origin of Windlesham church:¹⁹

Aliquando non fuerunt manentes in villa illa [ie Windlesham] nisi tantum tres homines qui fuerunt parochiani pertinentes ad ecclesiam de Wokinges, et apud Wokinges fuerunt corpora sepulti et pueri baptizati; et crevit villa, et quare longe fuerunt de Wokinges venit quidam Honing' qui tenuit in capite de domino rege, et in tantum locutus fuit cum persona qui tunc temporis fuit apud Wokinges quod concessit ei quod faceret ibi quoddam oratorium, in quo aliquando celebravit capellanus de Wokinges et aliquando legit ewangelium.

At the end of the 12th century, the Augustinian priory of Newark was founded in the adjacent parish of Send. Its origins lie in a grant made by a local landowner, Ruald de Calne, in 1191–8:²⁰

Sciant presentes et futuri quod ego Rualdus de Calna et Beatrix uxor mea . . . dedimus et concessimus deo et beate Marie et beato martiri Thome et canonicis ibidem deo servientibus et servituris . . . terram que dicitur hamma de Pappeworth . . . ad construendam ibidem ecclesiam in honore beate Marie virginis et gloriosi martiris Thome in loco qui dicitur Aldebury . . . Preterea dedimus . . . ecclesiam de Sandes cum oratorio de Ripelia cum omnibus aliis ad eandem ecclesiam pertinentibus.

This document grants the Priory site to an existing body of canons. While this need mean no more than that Ruald had brought the community into existence before providing its home, the name of Newark ('de Novo Loco') which the canons adopted within the next two decades suggests a migration from elsewhere.²¹ The 'oratory' of Ripley in Send parish, included in the foundation grant, has been suggested as their earlier home on the strength of its vaulted and lavishly decorated late Norman chancel;²² but this is identifiable with a small hospital dedicated to St Mary Magdalen.²³ It is tempting to see the regular canons of St Mary and St Thomas the Martyr at Newark as secular canons from Woking, re-established within their old *parochia* under a new guise and dedication; of all religious orders the Augustinian canons were the most

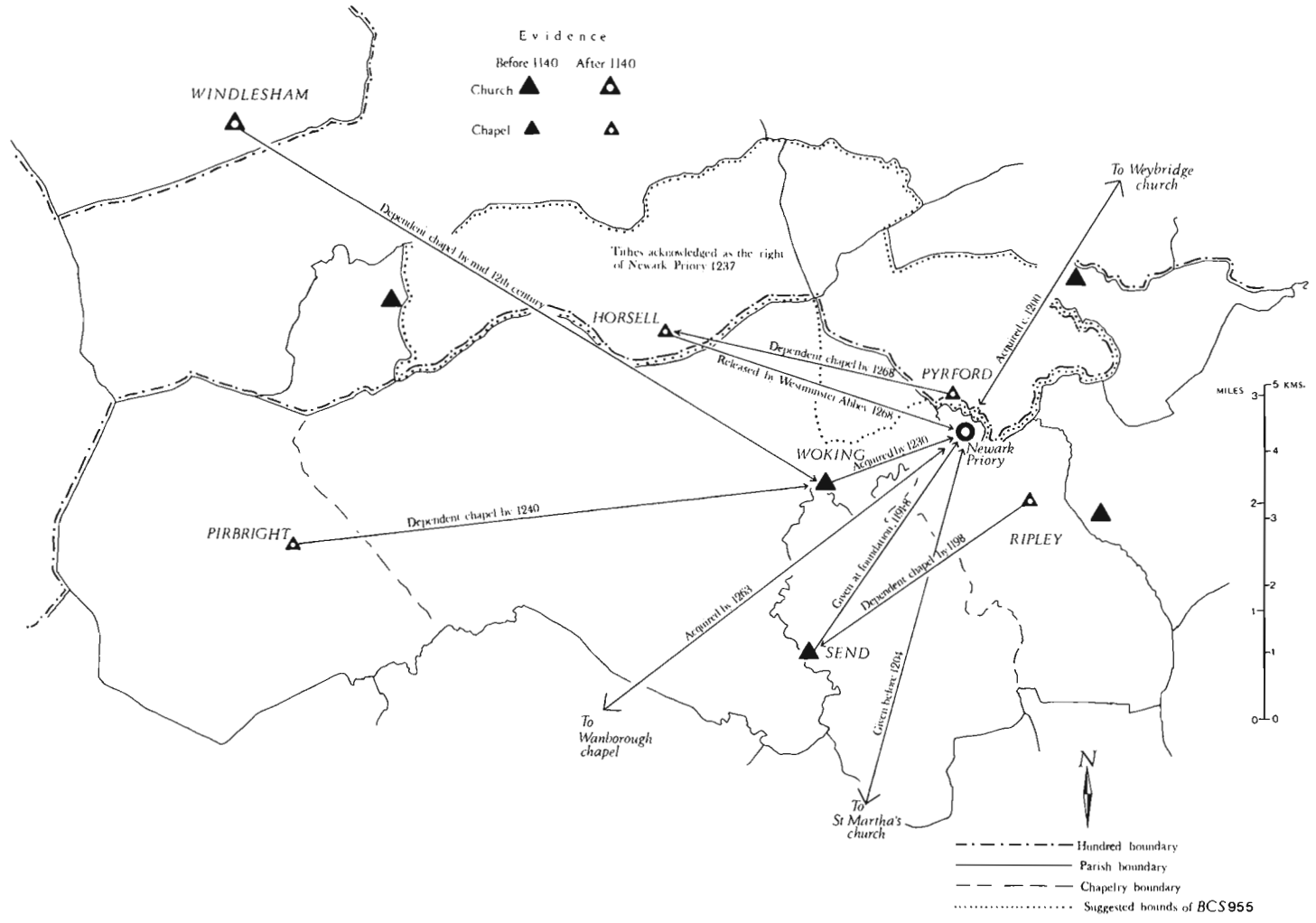


Fig 26 The earlier spiritual endowments of Newark Priory, probably reflecting the remains of Woking minster parish

frequent successors of earlier secular communities (below, pp106–7). Other attributes which passed to the canons of Newark reinforce this idea: Woking church was in their hands by 1230, and parochial rights over Pirbright were recovered shortly afterwards.²⁴

The hypothesis of direct continuity from Woking minster to Newark Priory implies that the original *parochia* included not merely Woking, Pirbright and Windlesham parishes but also Send and Ripley; it may be noted that Woking parish church is virtually on the Woking/Send boundary. Other links are suggestive but inconclusive. In 1258 the Priory acquired the chapels on the adjoining Westminster Abbey manor of Pyrford with Horsell – where, significantly, it already held tithe rights.²⁵ The advowsons of other near though not contiguous parishes were acquired during the 13th century.²⁶ All in all, there is good circumstantial evidence that Woking minster parish originally comprised the entire Woking *regio* except for the Chertsey estate, and was thus considered to include the detached pasture at Windlesham when this acquired a settled population. Whether Woking or Chertsey minster came first (and the general historical context suggests the latter), the whole territory cannot have been served from a single religious centre for more than three or four decades.

Stoke-by-Guildford

Stoke church stood on a royal manor, and Domesday Book shows it farmed separately with half a hide. This suggests minster status, and the church remained important in the 12th and 13th centuries (below, p106). However, there is no trace of mother-church rights over neighbouring parishes; if Stoke ever had a *parochia* it must have adjoined or crossed the boundary between the ‘Woking’ and ‘Godalming’ *regiones*, and it does not fit easily into the general territorial scheme. In the context of reorganisation in this area for military purposes during the 9th and 10th centuries (above, p21), it may be that Stoke-by-Guildford church was a relatively late foundation which had no part in the pre-Viking network of minster parishes.

Farnham

In 685 × 7 the large multiple estate of Farnham was granted by Cædwalla of Wessex to Cedde, Cisi and Criswa ‘ad construendum monasterium’ (above, p25, fig 9C). It is not explicitly stated that the monastery was itself to be at Farnham; but the Domesday church there, separately farmed and with its large *valet* of £6, bears all the marks of an old minster. Clearly this was an important and well-established mother church.

In 1291 Farnham church with its chapels was taxed on the very high valuation of £94 13s 4d,²⁷ and as late as 1535 the whole of Farnham hundred was still one parish served by the mother church and three subordinate chapels.²⁸ It is virtually certain, then, that the original *parochia* included the whole of the Domesday manor and hundred, over which mother-church rights were fully maintained throughout the Middle Ages. If these rights ever extended into other parts of the ‘Godalming’ *regio* (above, p14), they perished too early to leave any trace in written sources.

Godalming

Two 9th-century sculpture fragments, now loose in Godalming parish church, suggest that by that date there was a church of some importance in the vicinity.²⁹ Its *parochia* is reasonably well-defined, thanks to the stable estate boundaries and one exceptional source. In 1086 the royal

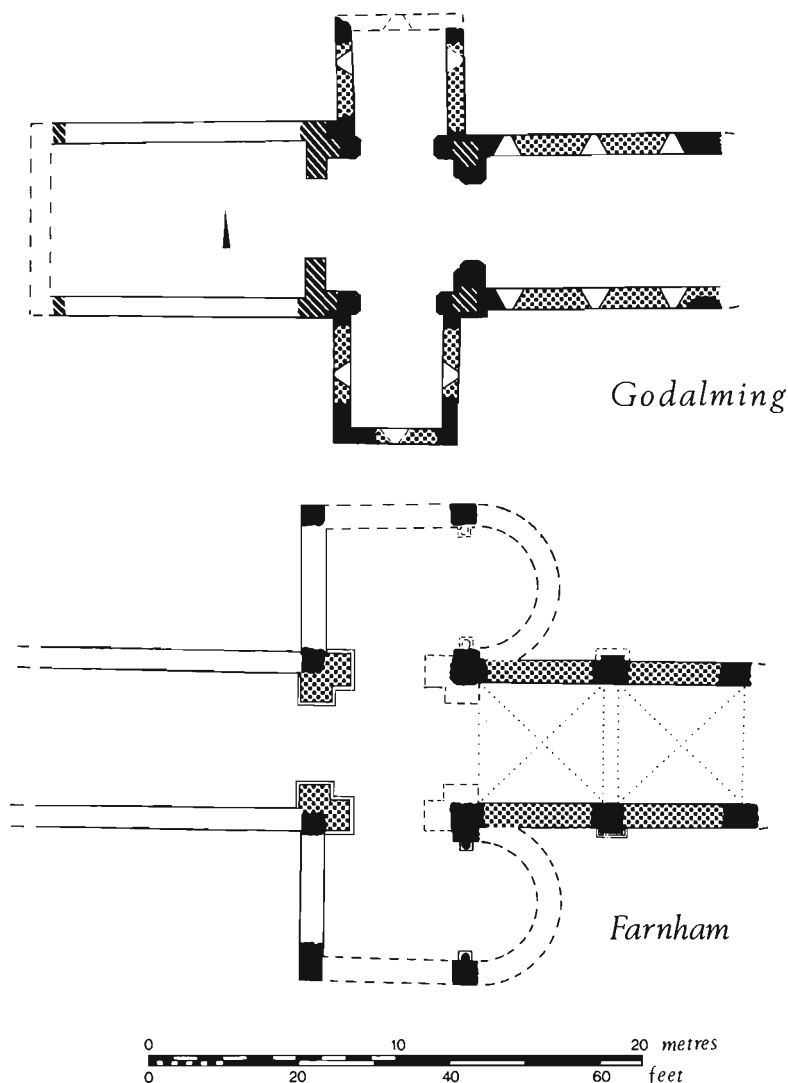


Fig 27 Godalming and Farnham churches: interpretation of the late Anglo-Saxon and Norman phases (For key to shading conventions, see px)

'multiple estate' covered the entire hundred except for Gilbert fitz Richer's manor of Witley with Thursley and the small independent enclaves of Hambledon and Peperharow. Domesday lists two churches at Godalming, one endowed with three hides and both held by Ranulf Flambard. Whether Ranulf regained possession on his return from exile is uncertain, but when, in 1109–17, Henry I granted Godalming church to Salisbury Cathedral as part of a prebend, Ranulf kept a life-interest as a canon of Salisbury.³⁰ In 1158 Henry II confirmed 'ecclesiam de Godelming cum ecclesiis et capellis et terris et decimis ceterisque eidem ecclesie adiacentibus', and a detailed visitation of the rectory and its appurtenances conducted by the dean of Salisbury in 1220 still shows the Domesday royal manor as one parochial unit, with no less than five chapels subject in different ways to the main church (fig 47).³¹

The mother church in 1220 was dedicated to SS Peter and Paul, and should be identified with the present parish church which still bears this dedication. The earliest phase is a little two-cell late Saxon building, greatly extended early in the 12th century (fig 27, upper; cf fig 31).³² Its exceptionally large glebe, which made Godalming one of the wealthiest churches in Surrey, presumably included Flambard's three hides.³³ But according to the 1220 survey this was not the oldest church on the manor; for

Item est ibi capella in campo de Godelming, versus Tiwerlei, que est de beata Virgine, ubi primo fuit sita ecclesia de Godelming. Non celebratur in ea nisi ter in anno, scilicet in Purificatione Beate Virginis, in vigilia Assumptionis et in Nativitate Beate Virginis, et hoc fit tantum propter devotionem que habetur ad locum illum; et fuit ibi cymeterium ab antiquo.

Clearly these were the two Domesday churches with their hierarchy reversed. The old mother church, on the hillside at Tuesley a mile or so from the modern town, had declined to a semi-deserted chapel. (In the 1550s it was still known as 'Oldmynster'; it has now vanished, though the site is known and has been excavated after a fashion.)³⁴ The later and humbler building, more conveniently sited, took on the functions and endowments of its predecessor and was suitably enlarged.³⁵

Kingston upon Thames

The holding of an ecclesiastical council at Kingston in 838,³⁶ the existence in the church of an 8th-century cross-shaft fragment,³⁷ and the coronations there of several kings between Edward the Elder in 900 and Æthelred in 979,³⁸ all imply an important church. Domesday Book is unhelpful, but in the 12th century Kingston church emerges with a large parish and dependent chapelries.

The Augustinian priory of Merton was founded by Gilbert the sheriff and established on its final site in 1117 (below, p124). The foundation narrative has little to say of its endowments, but a late list of benefactions preserved by Leland includes 'ecclesia de Kingeston in Surrey cum 4 capellis annexis impropriata', the gift apparently being attributed to Gilbert himself.³⁹ This is unsatisfactory evidence; but Merton certainly had an interest in Kingston by the 1180s, while in 1231–8 the canons were said to have held the church 'a longis retro temporibus'.⁴⁰ In view of this, the absence of Kingston church from a general confirmation of spiritualities made in 1177–88 seems to imply its *presence* in a lost confirmation by Bishop Henry of Blois (1129–72), ratified but not recited in the extant text of the later document.⁴¹ The evidence thus suggests that the church of Kingston royal manor was among Henry I's gifts to Gilbert the sheriff, and that Gilbert gave it to Merton at some date between the Priory's foundation and his death in 1130.

The four chapelries of Petersham, Sheen, Thames Ditton and East Molesey remained dependent on Kingston until 1769.⁴² An agreement of 1266 emphasises the subservience of Petersham chapel to the mother church,⁴³ notwithstanding its appearance in 1086 on the Chertsey Abbey estate. Thus Kingston church had, in addition to its own large parish (above, p20), parochial jurisdiction over the entire Domesday hundred of Kingston except Long Ditton, Malden and their outliers,⁴⁴ and even these churches were secured to Merton Priory shortly before 1188. The church of Malden with Chessington chapel was given by Eudes de Malden, and Long Ditton church by Peter de Tolworth, both taking the habit at Merton shortly after.⁴⁵ As with the Newark Priory churches, it is unclear if these were free benefactions or prompted by some earlier claim. But the rather cumbersome statement that Long Ditton church was given by Peter de Tolworth 'cuius hereditas terra illa in qua sita est ecclesia fuit' echoes his earlier release

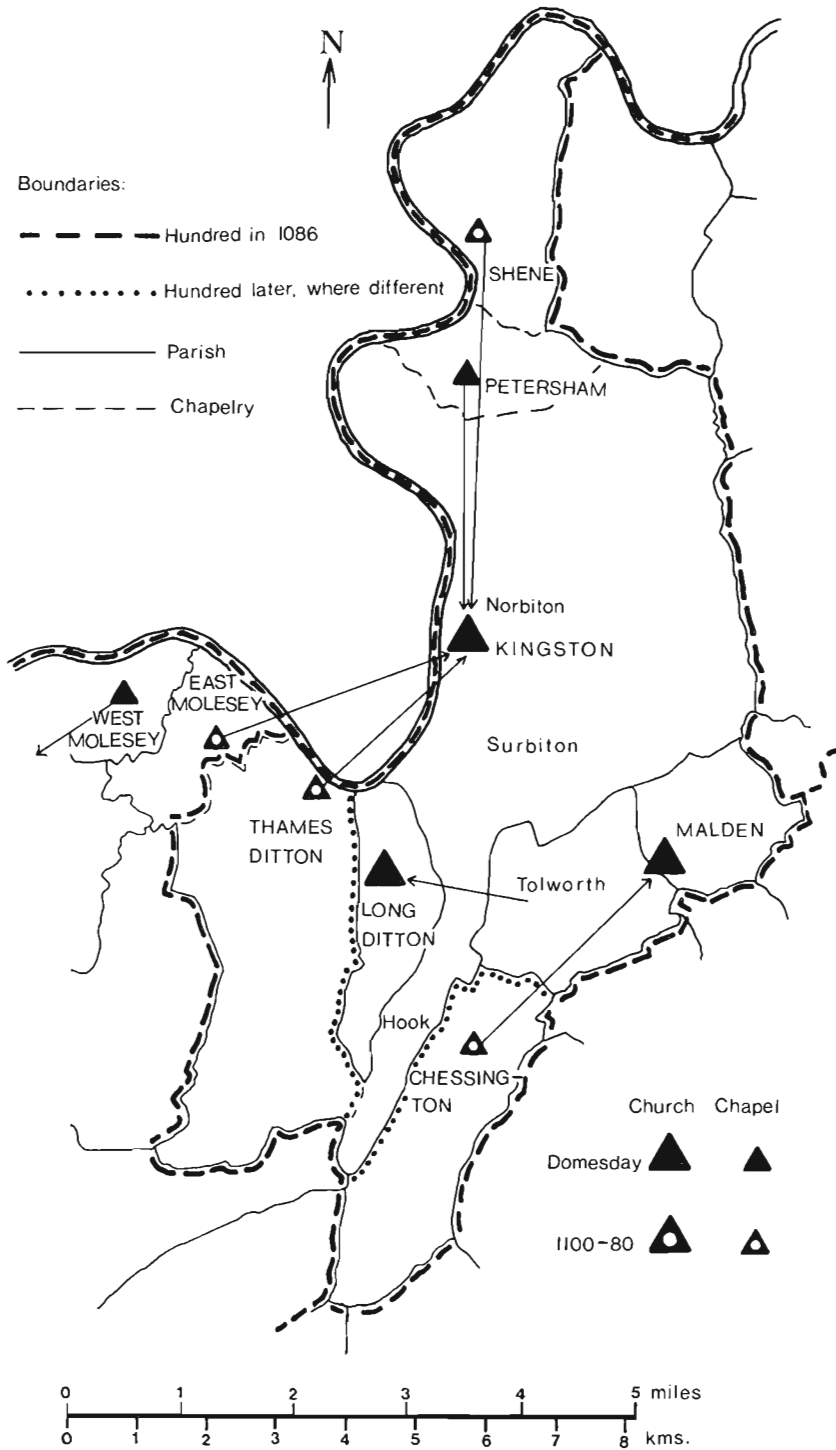


Fig 28 Kingston church and its dependencies: the remains of the minster parish

to Lewes Priory of Horne church 'que est in territorio meo' (below, pp153–4); the limiting implication of the phrase (that Peter owned the land only, not the church) suggests that Merton had rights in the church already.

Thus the early minster at Kingston served most and probably all of Kingston hundred as existing in 1086 (fig 28). If the *parochia* was ever larger, it seems most likely that it extended westwards to include Elmbridge hundred; even in 1086 the dependent chapel of East Molesey lay beyond the hundred boundary. In support of this is the likelihood (above, pp14–17) that the two hundreds had formed the northern end of a single primary provincial territory.

Leatherhead

In the central area of the same territory, another major church can be identified. Of all the Surrey minsters, Leatherhead is the most mysterious in its eventual fate.⁴⁶ The royal manor appears in King Alfred's will, and later evidence associates official functions with Pachenesham manor on the claylands in the north of the parish (above, p20). The Domesday church and its 40 acres, farmed in 1086 for 20s, has generally been identified with the present parish church and its large glebe. This view, however, involves some problems.

The present church and virtually the whole glebe lie within the territory of Thorncroft manor, a Domesday property of Richard fitz Gilbert. Soon after 1100 Eudes Dapifer gave it to his newly-founded abbey of Colchester. Since Richard fitz Gilbert was Eudes's father-in-law it seems most likely that Eudes had acquired the church from him as his wife's dowry, and the link with Thorncroft manor is emphasised by the phrase of the Colchester charter, 'in Turnecroft ecclesiam ipsius ville et unam hidam terre'.⁴⁷ This is hard to reconcile with the Domesday entry, which lists Leatherhead church as a member of the royal manor of Ewell without any Thorncroft connection; while a pre-1086 grant of two-thirds of the tithe from Richard's demesne at Thorncroft may even suggest that, in thus depriving the old minster of its due under Eadgar's laws, he was reserving the remaining third for an estate church there ignored by Domesday (below, pp148–9).

On the other hand, an enclave of land in the north of the parish surrounded by Pachenesham territory was held of Ewell manor from at least the 13th century at 20s rent.⁴⁸ This location, near a manorial centre owing services associated with county jurisdiction, is a plausible site for the minster. One explanation best fits the puzzling circumstances: that the Domesday church had disappeared, its 20s *valet* remaining fossilized as a rent from the former glebeland.⁴⁹ The residual attributes of the old minster passed to a private estate church more conveniently sited near the river crossing: the former Thorncroft church emerges with parochial jurisdiction over the whole of Leatherhead parish and its adjoining chapelry of Ashtead.⁵⁰ These developments, if correctly interpreted, are more surprising than in the parallel case of Godalming, for the two Leatherhead churches were in different hands.

Southwark

The transition from secular to regular community, hinted at in the case of Newark, is quite clear at Southwark: the Domesday *monasterium*, in royal hands TRE, was reformed as St Mary's Augustinian priory. The 'aque fluctum' attached to it in 1086 (above, p94) can only be identified with St Mary Overy (now St Saviour's) Dock, and excavations here in 1980 between the Priory church and the river encountered a large 10th-century culvert which had evidently formed part of a dock.⁵¹ In the 16th century the Priory preserved a garbled tradition that a community of

sisters on the site preceded a house of secular canons, themselves finally replaced by Augustinian regulars.⁵² The Priory's own Annals, in a manuscript of c1206, record under 1106 that 'Hic constitutus est ordo canonicorum in ecclesia Sancte Marie de Suthewerca'.⁵³ Probably the earliest original authority is a grant to the canons by William de Warenne II which is dated 'primo anno quo in eadem ecclesia canonici regulares effecti sunt'.⁵⁴

The independent use of these elliptical phrases implies that the establishment of Austin canons was more a regularisation than a foundation *de novo*. This accords so well with the general pattern of early Augustinian houses that continuity from the pre-Conquest *monasterium* can scarcely be doubted.⁵⁵ As J C Dickinson has pointed out, 'ordo canonicorum' need not necessarily mean Augustinians; regularisation a decade or so after 1106 might better suit the chronology of other Augustinian foundations. The traditions which name William Giffard, bishop of Winchester, as the founder, and which state that he established secular canons at Southwark, may preserve memories of an intermediate phase.⁵⁶ The hypothesis that Giffard received this royal minster while the king's chancellor (1094–1101), and re-founded it as a secular college which was regularised shortly afterwards, accords with a wider pattern.⁵⁷

By contrast, there seems to be no real evidence for survival of mother-church status in a jurisdictional sense. The early endowments all result from Norman benefactions (below, pp146–7), and no residual rights over churches in the form of pensions or portions can be identified.

Lambeth

According to Domesday Book (above, p94), Lambeth manor had been in the hands of King Edward's sister Godgifu before her death in 1056; in 1086 St Mary's church of Lambeth held it from the crown except for one field, then in the hands of Odo of Bayeux, which had belonged to the church in Godgifu's time. Soon afterwards the church and the whole vill were apparently given by William Rufus to Bishop Gundulf and his monks at Rochester.⁵⁸ Perhaps the best interpretation is that Godgifu had herself founded some kind of collegiate minster, endowing it with the whole manor. The only other Domesday holding of St Mary's church at Lambeth was Aston Subedge (Gloucestershire), and since this too had belonged TRE to Godgifu it supports the hypothesis of a fairly recent endowment.⁵⁹ The naming of the dedication by Domesday Book,⁶⁰ the language of the Domesday entry and the big endowment all suggest something more than an ordinary manorial church, even though there is no evidence of any special status after its acquisition by Rochester.⁶¹ A note that Rochester removed from Lambeth a gold and silver shrine, gospel-books, rich crucifixes and other ornaments, all of which had belonged to Godgifu,⁶² may mark the end of a private college or minster.

Bermondsey

The Peterborough sources which record a minster at Woking at the beginning of the 8th century (above, p95) mention another at *Vermundesei*, almost certainly to be identified with modern Bermondsey.⁶³ Nothing is known of its later Anglo-Saxon history, though recent excavations have produced a late Anglo-Saxon boundary ditch, and a piece of sculpture for which an 8th-century date has been claimed.⁶⁴ Nor is it possible to establish a direct link with the Cluniac priory of St Saviour, Bermondsey. This was traditionally founded in 1082, and although the first monks from La-Charité-sur-Loire did not arrive until 1089, it can scarcely be doubted that Domesday's 'nova et pulchra aeclesia' was the great Romanesque church which was to house

them.⁶⁵ Bermondsey may therefore be one genuine case of a minster totally destroyed by the Vikings.

Croydon

The easternmost territorial division of Surrey contained a royal 'central place' at Wallington and an archiepiscopal one at Croydon, the latter perhaps the focus of a 'multiple estate' with strong Kentish links (above, pp17–18, 25). Despite the importance of Wallington, no church is recorded there beyond a small medieval chapel built over a pre-Conquest domestic site.⁶⁶ Croydon was one of two manors in Surrey which the see of Canterbury is likely to have acquired before c800, and in 1086 it was easily the most populous and valuable property in Reigate and Tandridge hundreds.⁶⁷ The ecclesiastical synod held at Croydon in 809⁶⁸ suggests a centre of religious importance under the Mercian kings. Ælfsi priest of Croydon appears in a Kentish will of 973 × 87,⁶⁹ and Domesday Book mentions a church. In the later Middle Ages, Croydon church was exceptionally valuable and the centre of a rural deanery,⁷⁰ though there are no references to mother-church rights extending beyond the medieval parish. The weight of evidence suggests that when the Surrey/Kent border area came to acquire a minster, it was built neither at Wallington westwards nor at Sutton-at-Hone eastwards, but on a new archiepiscopal complex in between.

Godstone

Domesday Book lists Godstone (*Wachelestedede*) as the most valuable manor in Tandridge hundred, but mentions no church. There is no sign that the existing late Norman building, first mentioned in 1193, ever had more than ordinary parochial status.⁷¹ Yet in 973 × 87 Brihtric and Ælfswith bequeathed 'ða tyn hyda on Straettune into þæm mynstre to Wolnesstede'.⁷² However loose the usage of 'mynstre', an endowment of ten hides suggests something a good deal more important than an ordinary estate church. As the identification seems certain,⁷³ the bequest must record an otherwise unknown religious community which disappeared during the next century or so. The will is Kentish, and also mentions a priest at Croydon (above). Perhaps the minster was founded relatively late, in the Wealden hinterland of the original Croydon estate (above, pp17–18), to serve developing communities in the Tandridge and Lingfield area.⁷⁴

The political and territorial context of the minster churches

There are now strong indications that many, perhaps most of the English kingdoms had acquired a coherent system of *parochiae* by the early 8th century.⁷⁵ It is therefore perfectly possible that most of the Surrey minsters were as old as this, though specific evidence only exists in the cases of Chertsey, Farnham, Woking and Bermondsey. Farnham, founded in 685 × 7 after Cædwalla had won ascendancy from Mercia, may be the latest of the four. Chertsey, which must be the earliest, was built by a king of Kent, but its main estate came from Frithuwold, a Mercian sub-king; clearly it was brought under Mercian control and patronage within a very few years of its foundation.⁷⁶

There is one further piece of evidence which links the origins of Chertsey, Woking and Bermondsey minsters and sets them in a wider world. Frithuric, the presumed kinsman of Frithuwold who appears as first witness to his Chertsey charter (above, p7), can almost certainly

be identified with Friduric, *princeps* of King Æthelred of Mercia, who in 675 × 91 gave land at Breedon-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire, to Peterborough to found a daughter monastery.⁷⁷ Hædda, first abbot of Breedon, was also abbot of Woking and Bermondsey by 708 × 15 (above, p95), and the order of entries in a 12th-century Peterborough list suggests some possibility that Woking, Bermondsey and Repton minsters were dependencies of Breedon.⁷⁸ In other words, the sister or perhaps mother house of Woking and Bermondsey was founded by a relative or close associate of the main benefactor of Chertsey. Evidently the first Surrey minsters must be seen in the wider context of patronage by a noble dynasty under the successive overlordships of Wulfhere and Æthelred.

Origins in or before the 9th century can be claimed on sculptural evidence for Kingston and Godalming, and *prima facie* seem likely enough for Croydon and Leatherhead. But not all minsters were so early. Southwark and Stoke-by-Guildford, both associated with *burh* towns and both lacking recorded *parochiae*, may belong to the category of 'burghal minsters' originating with the re-conquest under Alfred and his successors.⁷⁹ Geographical considerations suggest that Godstone minster was relatively new (or even completely new) when it was endowed so lavishly in 973 × 87; while Lambeth college, if it was such, may have been founded by one of the last Anglo-Saxon aristocrats. These cases emphasise the fact that in the 10th and 11th centuries the college of priests was still acceptable ecclesiastically, even if it was becoming obsolete parochially.

In terms of the early territorial geography, there is a basic difference between minsters set on their own large estates (Chertsey, Farnham, ?Croydon), and the larger number built near centres of royal power. Whether the parochial functions of the former group ever extended outside their own lands is uncertain, though it may be that the earliest *parochiae* were coterminous with the provincial territories and were subdivided during the 8th and early 9th centuries as more minsters were established. The same period saw the breakup of the old provincial framework, progressively overlain by the accretion of manorial rights and fragmented into the smaller districts which were to emerge as hundreds. In this period of flux a wide range of political, territorial and pastoral factors, varying between different parts of England, are likely to have dictated the choice of minster sites.⁸⁰

At all events, minsters and hundreds were closely related in late Saxon Surrey (fig 4). Most minsters stood near the medieval centres of hundred jurisdiction and the settlements bearing the hundred names. Without circularity of argument it is hard to demonstrate in general terms that hundreds and *parochiae* were coterminous, but this is certainly true in the particular cases of Farnham, Chertsey and probably Godalming. No hundred contained more than one minster except Brixton, where Southwark may well have been a post-Danish successor to Bermondsey rather than co-existing with it, and Woking, where Stoke-by-Guildford church may also be relatively late. Nor is there any trace of minster jurisdictions crossing hundred boundaries apart from the dependence of East Molesey on Kingston church, which is explained by the evident relationship between Elmbridge and Kingston hundreds. Further, to regard Elmbridge with Kingston and Copthorne with Effingham as two groups of paired hundreds (above, p17) leaves no hundred without its minster, excepting only the conspicuous gap formed by the Weald and Greensand hundreds of Blackheath, Wotton and Reigate (fig 25).

Surrey, then, displays that close relationship between minsters and hundreds which is a conspicuous feature of some parts of England and as conspicuously absent in others: it applies, for instance, in Hampshire and in parts of Kent and Sussex, but apparently not in Devon.⁸¹ Most of the minsters are probably older than the final crystallisation of the hundreds; indeed, they may themselves have influenced the topography of hundred centres and boundaries. They were fixed points, foci of involvement for widely scattered populations and probably powerful stimuli for the growth of settlements around them.⁸² They may have enhanced the status of the *villae* with which they were associated, and helped these to emerge superior to others when old units were re-moulded.

It seems possible that the siting of minsters in Surrey was influenced, partly at least, by a

deliberate pastoral scheme. At all events, the distribution of mother churches existing in the century or so before the Conquest (that is, excluding Lambeth and Bermondsey) is logical in practical terms (fig 25). Six-mile radii around the relevant sites include almost the whole county, excepting once again the central Weald. At a time when these minsters were all active, no inhabitant of Surrey was more than half a morning's walk from one of them unless he lived in the remoter parts of Blackheath, Wotton or Reigate hundreds. This geographical coverage suggests a network established with some degree of planning, at a date before the substantial settlement of the Weald.⁸³ If the nature of the ministry is obscure, we can at least say that an institutional basis existed for it by a relatively early date.

The survival of mother-church attributes and functions

Recent work has greatly modified the old picture of minsters destroyed by the Danes, overshadowed by the Benedictine abbeys, pastorally moribund. It is now clear that hundreds of secular minsters survived well into the 11th and probably into the 12th century, and that official support for the small minority which were reformed failed to divert lay patronage from the unreformed majority.⁸⁴ In Surrey, only Chertsey minster became Benedictine and has thus left written evidence of its fortunes. There is no reason why community life should not have continued in the others, but for them the evidence is little more than scattered traces.

No entry in the Surrey Domesday lists a group of clergy; only at Southwark is one perhaps implied in the word *monasterium*, though even this is equivocal. This is not negative evidence, but simply absence of evidence: it is abundantly clear that Domesday does not always or even usually mention such communities when they existed. Such information was less readily included where the habitual formula was *est ibi ecclesia*, as in Surrey, than in counties where *est ibi presbyter* or *est ecclesia cum presbyter* were employed.

For the Domesday commissioners unregularised minsters, like almost everything else, were first and foremost property. Whatever their internal constitution or functions, they share with ordinary estate churches the status of manorial appurtenances; in Surrey only Chertsey Abbey and the recently-endowed church at Lambeth are tenants in their own right. Minsters received fuller treatment than other churches in 1086 largely because most were farmed separately. At Kingston and Croydon we find a simple *ibi ecclesia* since these mother churches, exceptionally, were still in royal and archiepiscopal demesne with the manors themselves: to specify endowments was needless when there was no question of divided tenure.⁸⁵

Both before and immediately after the Conquest, many minsters (especially royal ones) were in the hands of clerical farmers.⁸⁶ The king had direct control of Southwark minster in 1066, though the statement that '*qui aecclesiam habebat de rege tenebat*' suggests that it had been farmed in the recent past. Wulfmær, who had held Godalming minster geld-free, is the only named pre-Conquest tenant of a Surrey church; probably he was identical with the king's priest of that name, a minor TRE landowner in Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire.⁸⁷ Royal priests were the most frequent recipients of valuable churches, and the unidentified William who held Stoke-by-Guildford church in alms in 1086 may have been another cleric in the Conqueror's household.

The other two TRW tenants of Surrey churches are more significant figures. The great Ranulf Flambard held both royal churches at Godalming. One Osbern 'de Ow', tenant of the royal minsters of Woking and Leatherhead and the episcopal minster of Farnham, must have been another wealthy ecclesiastic. He can probably be identified with the Osbern 'de Auco' who held a St Paul's prebend in c1100,⁸⁸ and perhaps also with the Osbern son of Hugh de Eu who appears as a Sussex landowner in 1086.⁸⁹ Both belonged to the class of great ecclesiastical pluralists and 'collectors' of minsters best typified by the Confessor's clerk Regenbald.⁹⁰

Though generally clerics, such men clearly held their churches *in absentia*. Apparently they were left free to exploit as best they could the incidents of mother-church status in return for a fixed farm based on the value of the glebelands;⁹¹ it was above all the large glebes which encouraged farming of old minsters, and marked them out as 'rectory manors' in the later middle ages.⁹² In the half-century or so before 1086 kings and bishops had come to view many of their mother churches as appropriate gifts for faithful servants or useful sources of revenue, neither more nor less.

Yet it need not follow that the pluralists were careless of their churches' spiritual functions, or that proprietorship was incompatible with a flourishing religious life. Our sources are concerned with tenure, and we cannot expect them to throw much light on the motives of the tenants. To the early Norman mentality proprietary monasteries were as acceptable as proprietary churches, and the new owners might very well have taken an active interest in the internal life of old secularised minsters. In fact it is clear that many small religious bodies of uncertain nature existed under Norman patronage, sometimes based on former minster clergy and sometimes newly founded. Whether or not they observed any formal rule (and generally this is impossible to establish), they shared with contemporary estate churches the status of property. Only a brief period elapsed before the percolating ideals of Gregorian reform, and the institutional structure of the new religious orders, made them obsolete. With hindsight it is easy to forget that colleges of secular canons had an entirely natural place in 11th-century society, and that the Conquest may briefly have revitalised them.⁹³

Surrey probably contained some of these evanescent re-foundations. Southwark, with its confused legend of a community of sisters and then one of canons preceding the Augustinians, may preserve some memory of the three-stage development outlined above. At Godalming, the extensive enlargement of the later church and its substitution for the old minster may well be Flambard's own work, and it is interesting to compare this with Christchurch Priory (Hampshire), another minster which he held in the 1090s. Here the old secular college was not refounded as an Augustinian priory until 1150, but a narrative source describes how Flambard had destroyed the old church, together with nine smaller ones around the cemetery and the canons' houses, to build the grand Norman church which still survives, financing this from the prebends and gradually reducing the number of canons.⁹⁴ Does the cruciform church at Godalming (fig 27, upper) reflect another such reorganisation by Flambard of an unrecorded collegiate body?

Farnham church was rebuilt very sumptuously in the mid 12th century, to a cruciform plan and with a vaulted two-bay chancel (fig 27, lower).⁹⁵ It is doubtful if arguments about status can rely much on architectural evidence, but both here and at Godalming the lavish plans (exceptional among Surrey churches), and especially the large chancels, may at least imply a staff of more than an ordinary parish priest. The cruciform plan of Kingston church could also be earlier than its Gothic detail, and beside it lay a detached Norman building.⁹⁶ The belief of Tudor townfolk here 'that wher their toun chirche is now was sumtyme an abbay'⁹⁷ hints at memories of a collegiate body surviving until its annexation to Merton Priory, and an oath taken in Kingston churchyard in 1258–63 to conclude a dispute about common of pasture between Thames Ditton and Claygate underlines the continued importance of the church in hundred affairs.⁹⁸ Stoke-by-Guildford church emerges as head of a rural deanery, and a charter witness-list of c1160–80 beginning with 'Gileberto decano, Godardo presbitero, Rogero sacerdote de Stoches' may reflect a small residual staff.⁹⁹ Direct continuity from Woking minster to Newark Priory (above, p95) would imply a community of some kind surviving through the 12th century, and the fine Norman west door at Woking, with its elaborate contemporary ironwork, suggests a higher-than-average status.

Whether such bodies retained a significant role in the parochial structure is unclear. The strong

popular appeal and involvement of the Austin canons made them fitting successors of old minster communities, and there is good evidence that in their early days they sometimes served parish churches in person.¹⁰⁰ With Benedictine monks, where the positive evidence is much less concrete, the position is still equivocal.¹⁰¹ Monastic or collegiate staffs might have been pastorally active in two ways: by going out to the people like earlier minster-priests, or by encouraging or forcing the inhabitants of the old *parochiae* to attend regular service at their mother churches. This is a different matter from the mere enforcement of financial or jurisdictional rights over resident clergy and their parishioners.¹⁰²

The survival into the Norman period of something resembling the minster system may be indicated by areas conspicuously lacking 11th-century churches. In Surrey the Chertsey Abbey endowments demonstrate this most clearly (fig 38). By 1086 all demesne manors lying more than nine miles from the Abbey had their own churches; but on the main estate in north-west Surrey Domesday lists only three churches, lying at distances of eight, eight and thirteen miles respectively. It is only during the later 12th century that churches or chapels appear at Chertsey itself, Thorpe and Egham, as well as on the detached but reasonably near demesnes of Cobham and East Clandon (below, p129). Since Domesday mentions some of the local churches belonging to Chertsey, the blank can scarcely result from a consistent under-recording of churches on ecclesiastical demesnes.¹⁰³ It seems evident that the areas most accessible from the Abbey were only 'parochialised' during the 12th century.

Farnham hundred, served by the mother church and probably only acquiring chapels in the 12th century, is another area where power at the centre may have delayed the foundation of local churches. Likewise, the relative sparseness of Domesday churches in the extreme north-east of Surrey (fig 32) is surprising in a region so densely settled and might reflect the survival of a ministry from Southwark, though the argument here is weaker in that no jurisdictional evidence supports it. Overall, pastoral care in Norman Surrey was already firmly based on local churches; the older system survived in places, but by the beginning of the 12th century it was patchy and residual. Whether the priests still went to the people or the people to the priests is impossible to say, though in the mid 12th century a chaplain still travelled periodically from Woking to serve the 'oratory' of Windlesham (above, p95).

In the 12th century many former minsters had chapels of late foundation. But in this they were not alone; after c1150 bishops were concerned to protect from encroachment the rights of *all* churches, irrespective of their earlier status (below, pp152–3). In Surrey it is hard to trace minster rights over churches which had existed in separate ownership from the 11th century or before. Kingston's chapels seem to have been founded at a relatively early date (above, p99), and one of them, the Chertsey Abbey demesne church at Petersham, is mentioned in Domesday. Apart from this, it cannot be demonstrated that a Surrey minster retained into the 12th century any authority over a church which was not either in the same ownership or founded after c1130; thus Godalming minster, the mother church of the royal manor, had no recorded authority over the few independent estates in the hundred (fig 47). The complex groups of rights and payments which elsewhere seem to reflect the late Saxon enforcement of minster authority are in Surrey completely absent, though there is no real lack of the sources in which they might have appeared.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

The relatively poor survival of mother-church authority in Surrey cannot be explained simply. In broad terms it is unsurprising in an area which by 1086 was better provided with local churches than many parts of England.¹⁰⁵ But the contrast with Hampshire, where the *parochiae*

appear decidedly more resilient, is remarkable. Perhaps this difference between two halves of one diocese merely reflects Surrey's remoteness from Winchester, and a correspondingly lesser involvement on the part of the bishops. In Hampshire, at the heart of the late Saxon and Norman kingdom, abundant in wealthy monasteries and with many large estates in episcopal hands, centralised ecclesiastical institutions may have been especially well-equipped to preserve their authority against encroachments. It is significant that at Farnham, the one great Surrey manor of the bishopric, the minster preserved its rights so well; in a sense it is more of a piece with the Hampshire than with the Surrey minsters.

The degree of wealth, status and parochial jurisdiction which the minsters still retained in 1066 must have affected their viability in the eyes of new owners and farmers. It is worth contrasting two minsters farmed in 1086 to Osbern de Ow: Farnham, at a *valet* of £6, and Leatherhead, at a *valet* of £1. The former had a dominant and secure position as the church of a single big manor where no alien interests could intrude. The latter was the last remnant of one royal manor now annexed to another, retaining only a fragment of its *parochia*, and with mother-church rights which neighbouring landowners failed to respect.¹⁰⁶ It is symptomatic that Farnham minster survived as a rich, important and architecturally imposing church, while Leatherhead minster disappeared.

Through this discussion it has become increasingly clear that patterns of landholding, not ecclesiastical right, were the prime factor in the ultimate fate of the Surrey minsters. Where economic and demographic under-development favoured the survival of large unitary estates, the mother churches continued to dominate: at Chertsey and Farnham the coterminous estates and *parochiae* continued together. But where small independent manors existed, their late Saxon and Norman owners possessed and founded churches with scant regard for minster authority.¹⁰⁷ Whether a local church had initially been staffed by a resident priest or by a visiting minster-priest seems in this context to be largely immaterial: provided that it was in separate hands by the late 11th century, the mother church was unlikely to retain any hold on it into the later Middle Ages. The minster parish, like the multiple estate, had largely succumbed to the centrifugal tendencies of the age.