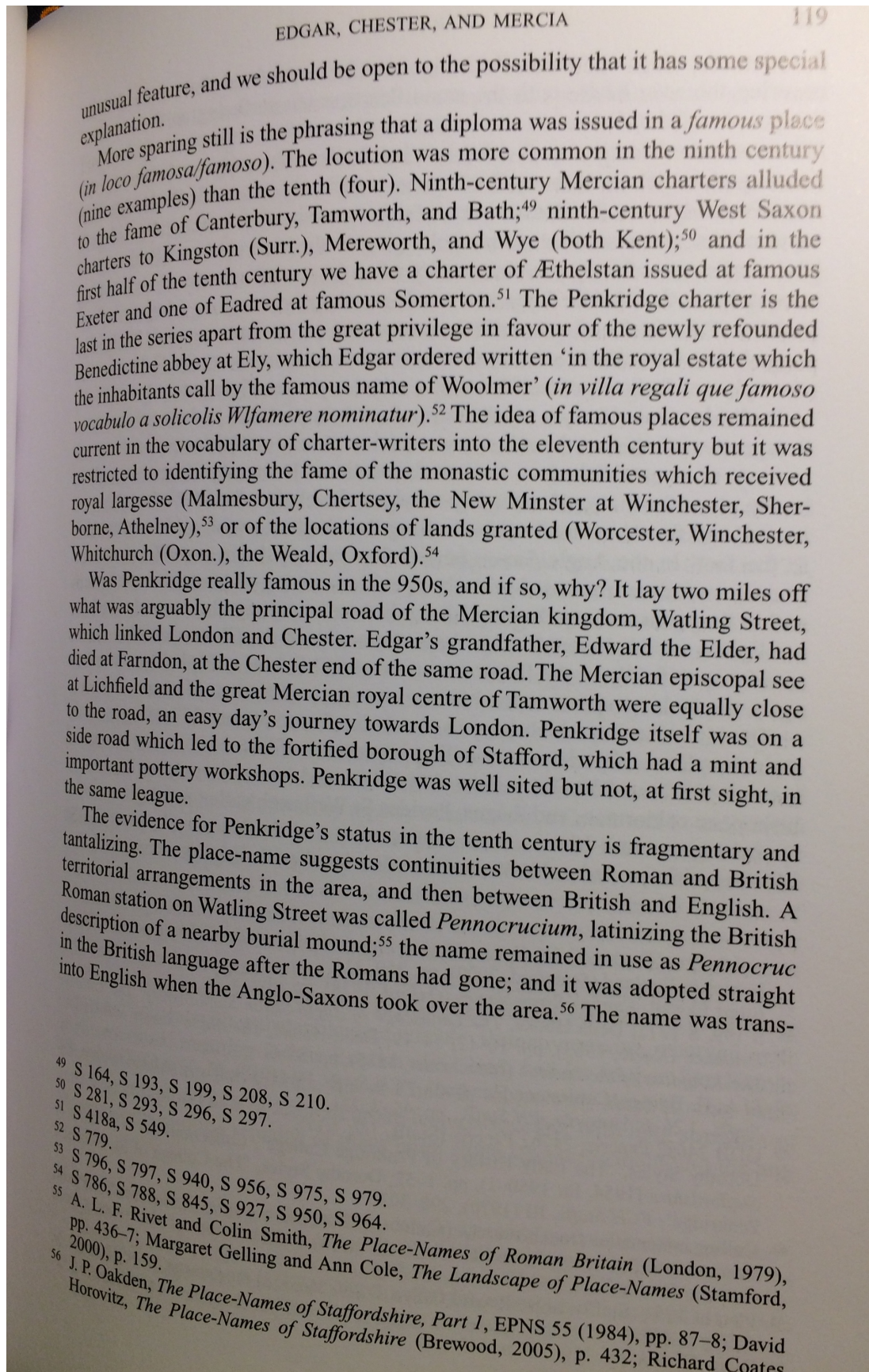


Below are two pages from the paper 'Edgar, Chester, and the Kingdom of the Mercians, 957-9' by C. P. Lewis (Edgar, King of the English 959-975, Donald Scragg (ed.), 2008). He discusses references to 'famous places' in Saxon charters. The description of Romsey in its charter as *loco celebri* is another instance.



The discussion continues focusing on the use of the word *locus*. I have added an image of the page referred to in fn. 64 from Blair (2005, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*). Both authors point out the use of *locus* to mean a monastery or minster.

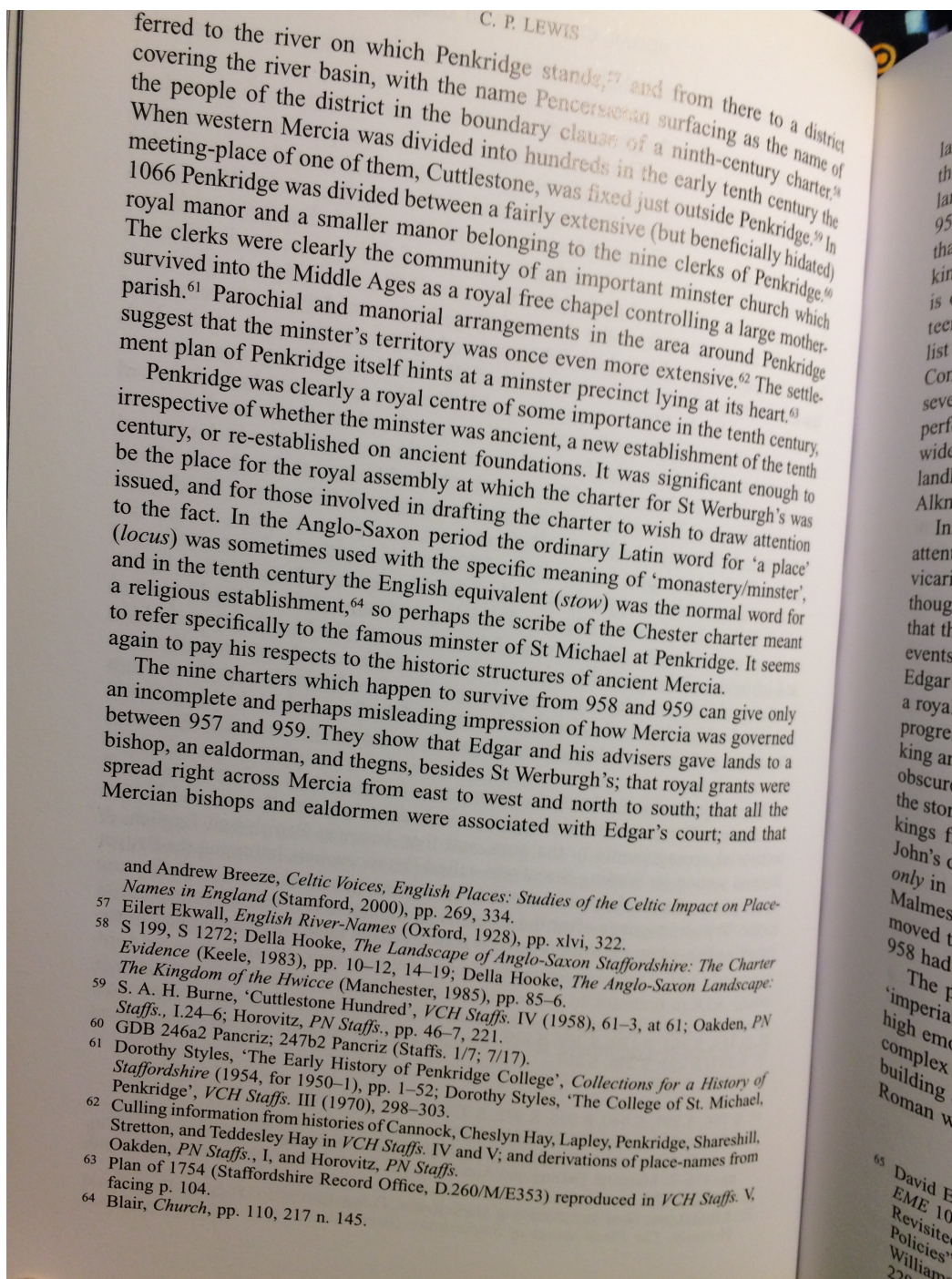
The line from the Romsey charter -

loco celebri qui ab huius prosapie solicolis Romeseye nobili nuncupatur vocabulo

has been translated (Walker, J., 1993, *Romsey Abbey Through the Centuries*, p. x) -

the well-known place which is called by its inhabitants of ancient stock by the noble name of Romsey

I think that the wording *loco celebri* is evidence of the presence of an earlier minster. Furthermore, I think the name of that minster was Romsey. The monastery of Nursling mentioned in the Life of St Boniface was at Nursling, not, as has been suggested, at Romsey. The ancient inhabitants of this famous place called it by its correct and noble name.



Bede's proposals are not entirely easy to follow, the more so because major aspects of the Northumbrian Church, common ground to these two close friends but not to us, are evidently taken for granted. Yet the letter does, in its slightly odd mixture of radicalism and compromise, provide important clues to the relationship between episcopal and monastic structures. Its strongly 'bishop-centred' stance has often been noted; what has been overlooked is the underlying assumption that administrative and pastoral structures depend on links between centres, especially monastic centres, and their dependencies. This becomes clearer when it is realized that in these passages Bede sometimes uses the nondescript word *locus* ('place') in the narrower sense of a specifically ecclesiastical place.¹³⁴ Thus when he says that no *locus vacans* for a new see can easily be found, and that Ecgberht should choose 'some place from among the minsters' and then let the abbot and convent elect their own bishop, he can scarcely mean that all topographically suitable sites have been used up. Rather, he is stating the need to set up the new see neither in a corrupt minster nor on an empty site, but in a community of appropriate standing.

Bede seems to be acknowledging the convention, the flouting of which had so annoyed Wilfrid, that bishops should be seated in minsters and chosen from their communities. He may also have thought it unlikely that any completely new foundation could attract an endowment matching that of a major minster from the previous generation. But the comment that the bishop should also take over 'as many of the attached *loca* as belonged to the same diocese' reveals another attraction of the scheme. The minster (which is evidently assumed to be large and fairly respectable) will already have a constellation of dependencies, perhaps scattered widely: those of them which lie in the new bishop's diocese could serve as ready-made local bases for his operations. He could augment them further by taking over scandalous minsters and transforming them into good-living establishments to assist him. The change being advocated is not that small minsters should be suppressed to make way for episcopal governance; rather, it is that the satellites of a large minster on the one hand, and a collection of autonomous and useless little minsters on the other, should be pulled together into a rational infrastruc-

¹³⁴ Elsewhere in the letter, Bede describes estates and peasant settlements as *territoria*, *possesiones*, *agelli*, or *viculi*; *locus* seems generally to mean a place in which a minster or bishopric has been or might be established (though this is not completely consistent since he complains (c. 11) 'ut omnino desit locus ubi filii nobilium aut emeritorum militum possessionem accipere possint'). Cf. Bede's report of the Synod of Hertford c. 4, forbidding monks to wander 'de loco ad locum, hoc est de monasterio ad monasterium' (*HE* iv. 5, p. 350). In the record of the 781 Synod of Brentford, a series of monastic sites are simply called *loca* (S 1257). See Davies 1978: 37–8, and Erchingham 1999: 93–4, 109, for the same convention in Welsh and Irish sources, and Dimier 1972 for early medieval Europe generally.