Loco celebri - 'Famous places' in Saxon Charters

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.

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unusual feature, and we should be open to the possibility that it has some special

More sparing still is the phrasing that a diploma was issued in a *famous* place explanation. (in loco famosa/famoso). The locution was more common in the ninth century (in loco junctury) than the tenth (four). Ninth-century Mercian charters alluded (nine examples) Canterbury, Tamworth, and Bath;⁴⁹ ninth-century West Saxon to the faint control west Saxon charters to Kingston (Surr.), Mereworth, and Wye (both Kent);⁵⁰ and in the first half of the tenth century we have a charter of Æthelstan issued at famous Exeter and one of Eadred at famous Somerton.⁵¹ The Penkridge charter is the last in the series apart from the great privilege in favour of the newly refounded Benedictine abbey at Ely, which Edgar ordered written 'in the royal estate which the inhabitants call by the famous name of Woolmer' (in villa regali que famoso vocabulo a solicolis Wlfamere nominatur).52 The idea of famous places remained current in the vocabulary of charter-writers into the eleventh century but it was restricted to identifying the fame of the monastic communities which received royal largesse (Malmesbury, Chertsey, the New Minster at Winchester, Sherborne, Athelney),⁵³ or of the locations of lands granted (Worcester, Winchester, Whitchurch (Oxon.), the Weald, Oxford).54

Was Penkridge really famous in the 950s, and if so, why? It lay two miles off what was arguably the principal road of the Mercian kingdom, Watling Street, which linked London and Chester. Edgar's grandfather, Edward the Elder, had died at Farndon, at the Chester end of the same road. The Mercian episcopal see at Lichfield and the great Mercian royal centre of Tamworth were equally close to the road, an easy day's journey towards London. Penkridge itself was on a side road which led to the fortified borough of Stafford, which had a mint and important pottery workshops. Penkridge was well sited but not, at first sight, in

The evidence for Penkridge's status in the tenth century is fragmentary and tantalizing. The place-name suggests continuities between Roman and British territorial arrangements in the area, and then between British and English. A Roman station on Watling Street was called *Pennocrucium*, latinizing the British description of a nearby burial mound;⁵⁵ the name remained in use as *Pennocruc* in the British language after the Romans had gone; and it was adopted straight into English when the Anglo-Saxons took over the area.⁵⁶ The name was trans-

⁴⁹ S 164, S 193, S 199, S 208, S 210.

- ⁵³ S 796, S 797, S 940, S 956, S 975, S 979. 54 S 786, S 788, S 845, S 927, S 950, S 964.

- A. L. F. Rivet and Colin Smith, The Place-Names of Roman Britain (London, 1979), Pp. 436-7: Margaria Colu pp. 436-7; Margaret Gelling and Ann Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford, 2000), p. 159 J. P. Oakden, The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part 1, EPNS 55 (1984), pp. 87-8; David Horovitz, The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part 1, EPNS 55 (1984), pp. 432: Richard Coates Horovitz, The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part I, EPNS 55 (1984), pp. 67-6, Data Horovitz, The Place-Names of Staffordshire (Brewood, 2005), p. 432; Richard Coates

S 281, S 293, S 296, S 297. ⁵¹ S 418a, S 549.

⁵² S 779

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.

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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.

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The Kingdom of the Hwicce (Manchester, 1983), pp. 10–12, 14–19; Della Hooke, The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: 59 S. A. H. Burne, 'Cuttlestone Hundred', VCH Staff, 1246, Luce Staffs, 1246, Lu	The The
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 ⁶³ Plan of 1754 (Staffs., I, and Horovitz, <i>PN Staffs.</i> facing p. 104. ⁶⁴ Blair, <i>Church</i>, pp. 110, 217. 	⁶⁵ David E. EME 10

Minsters in Church and State, c.650-850 Bede's proposals are not entirely easy to follow, the more so because the solution of the Northumbrian Church, common ground to these two does to be taken for granted. Vet the taken for granted vet the set to be taken for granted. Bede's proposals are not entirely easy to the nore so because nore so because nore so because nore aspects of the Northumbrian Church, common ground to these two down aspects of the Northumbrian to us, are evidently taken for granted. Yet the letter down aspects of the Northumbrian Church, contracting for and to these two down friends but not to us, are evidently taken for granted. Yet the letter does friends but not to us, are of radicalism and compromise, provide imposite interval. friends but not to us, are evidency taken and compromise, provide important its slightly odd mixture of radicalism and compromise, provide important the relationship between episcopal and monastic structure its slightly odd mixture or radicanon episcopal and monastic structures la clues to the relationship between has often been noted; what has been clues to the relationship between open provident of the structures strongly 'bishop-centred stance the looked is the underlying assumption that administrative and pastoral struc-looked is the underlying between centres, especially monastic centres looked is the underlying assumption of the specially monastic centres, and the tures depend on links becomes clearer when it is realized that in these tures depend on links between centres, and the dependencies. This becomes clearer when it is realized that in these passes dependencies in the nondescript word *locus* ('place') in the dependencies. This becomes elemented of the second Bede sometimes uses the normal place.¹³⁴ Thus when he says that no loce sense of a specifically ecclesiastical place.¹³⁴ Thus when he says that no loce sense of a specificanty content of the found, and that Ecgberht should choose vacans for a new see can easily be found, and then let the able of the set o '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

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, pesones, agelli, or viculi; locus seems general siones, 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 been or might be established (though this is not completely consistent since he complains (c. 11) ut omnino desit locus ubi filii nobilium autority and 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 care for a for a formation of the synod of designed by the loco ad locum. 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' (HF ::: hoc est de monasterio ad monasterium' (*HE* iv. 5, p. 350). In the record of the 781 Synod of Brent ford, a series of monastic sites are simply called the 780. In the record of the 781 Synod of Etching ford, a series of monastic sites are simply called *loca* (S 1257). See Davies 1978: 37-8, and Erching ham 1999: 93-4, 109, for the same convention in Wal. ham 1999: 93-4, 109, for the same convention in Welsh and Irish sources, and Dimier 1972 for early medieval Europe generally.