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THE DATE OF THE PARISH-BOUNDARY OF MINSTER-IN-THANET (KENT)

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The problem of when and how the English parishes were established has never been satisfactorily resolved. The generally accepted view, namely that they were carved out of the large territories allotted to the so-called 'Old Minsters' of Anglo-Saxon England, is a largely unproven hypothesis; and concrete evidence has rarely been advanced for the often-expressed opinion that they are based on Anglo-Saxon estates and that their boundaries correspond to those described in the Anglo-Saxon charters.¹ The present paper aims to contribute to discussion of this subject by presenting evidence for the antiquity of the Minster-in-Thanet parish-boundary and by examining the significance of this for the history of the ecclesiastical and tenurial divisions of the Isle of Thanet.

A medieval map of Thanet in the 'History of St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury' by Thomas of Elmham seems to be the work of the author and is intended as an illustration to the 'History', writing of which was abandoned in 1414. Felix Hull has recently argued that the map itself was drawn in about 1410 or 1411.² It shows the coastline of Thanet

¹ See, for example, M. Deanesly, 'Early English and Gallic Minsters', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 4th ser., xxiii (1941), 25-69; F.M. Stenton, 'St. Frideswide and her Times', *Oxoniensia*, i (1936), 103-12, reprinted in *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D.M. Stenton (1970), especially 231-2; and G.W.O. Addleshaw, *The Beginnings of the Parochial System*, St. Anthony's Hall Publications iii (n.d.), 11-15. For Kentish parishes, see *The Domesday Monachorum of Christ Church, Canterbury*, ed. D.C. Douglas (1944), 8-13, and G. Ward, 'The List of Saxon Churches in the Domesday Monachorum and the White Book of St. Augustine', *Arch. Cant.*, xlv (1933), 60-89. On charter-boundaries and parishes, see C. Taylor, 'The Anglo-Saxon Countryside', *Anglo-Saxon Settlement and Landscape*, ed. T. Rowley (1974), 12.

² The 'History' is printed as *Historia Monasterii S. Augustini Cantuariensis* by Thomas of Elmham, ed. C. Hardwick, Rolls Series (1858). A facsimile of the map forms the frontispiece but a more accurate facsimile is to be published in *Local Maps and Plans from Medieval England*, ed. P.D.A. Harvey and R.A. Skelton (forthcoming 1980). A photograph appears in M.J. Swanton, 'A Fragmentary Life of St. Mildred and other Kentish Royal Saints', *Arch. Cant.*, xci (1975), facing 16. On the date, see Hardwick, *op. cit.*, xix-xxiii, and F. Hull in Harvey, *op. cit.* I am grateful to Dr. Hull for allowing me access to his work prior to publication.

(which was at that time a genuine island) in relation to the mainland, marks the road-system and a number of place-names and represents in diagrammatic form the churches of the Isle together with Reculver on the mainland.³ The prime purpose of the map, however, is to illustrate the foundation-legend of the monastery of Minster-in-Thanel, which Elmham recounts.⁴ According to Elmham's version, this resulted from a killing in the reign of King Egberht of Kent (*d.* 673) who feared the potential claim to the throne of his cousins, Aethelberht and Aethelred, and allowed his servant, Thunor, to kill and secretly bury them. When a ray of divine light revealed the whereabouts of their grave, however, Egberht was stricken with remorse and fear. He accordingly summoned their sister, Domne Eafe (alias Eormenburh), from the West Midlands, where she was living, and offered her whatever she might choose as compensation for her brothers' deaths. She chose to have as much land on Thanet as her tame hind would run a circuit round and this was granted. Elmham's map represents the making of this grant: he has sketched the hind beginning its course from Westgate-on-Sea, whence he has traced its route as a green line which twists and turns across the Isle to the Wantsum, effectively granting the eastern portion (including the site of Minster) to Domne Eafe. According to Elmham's account, Thunor attempted to stop the grant being made as the hind ran but was swallowed by the earth for his temerity: Elmham has recorded this event by marking 'puteus thunor', supposedly the pit formed when Thunor met this fate.

It is not of course necessary to accept the story of Domne Eafe's hind as literal truth or to regard the green line on Elmham's map as an actual representation of the animal's course. However, Felix Hull has recently shown that Elmham was remarkably accurate in recording place-names and churches on his map;⁵ so there is a possibility that the 'course of the hind' corresponded to some actual boundary which existed in Elmham's time and with which the legend of the hind was associated. That this was indeed the case emerges from a comparison of Figs. 1 and 2. The former is an extract from Elmham's map showing the 'course of the hind' and adjacent place-names; the latter is taken from the Tithe Maps and the first edition of the Ordnance Survey 6-in. map and shows the parish-boundaries of the corresponding part of Thanet as they appeared in the early nineteenth century, prior to the

³ On Thanet as an island, see J.A. Steers, *The Coastline of England and Wales*, 2nd edn. (1964), 334-7.

⁴ Hardwick, *op. cit.* in note 2, 191-2, 206-8 and 214-17. This legend is found in various medieval texts in addition to Elmham's 'History'. On the validity and origins of the versions found in these texts, see my 'The Mildrith Legend: A Study in early medieval Hagiography in England' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1978), sections of which will be published shortly. See also below, p. 0.

⁵ *Op. cit.* in note 2.

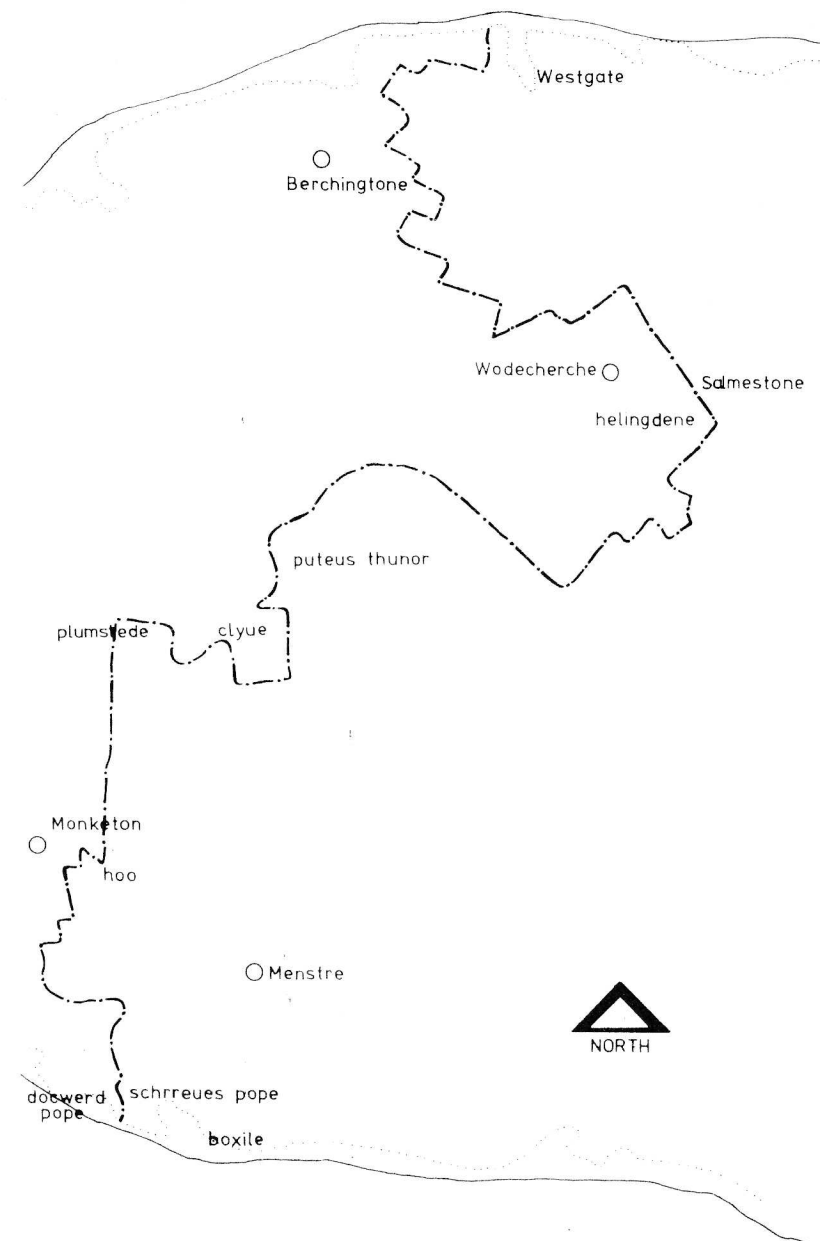


Fig. 1. The 'Course of the Hind' from Elmham's Map of Thanet.

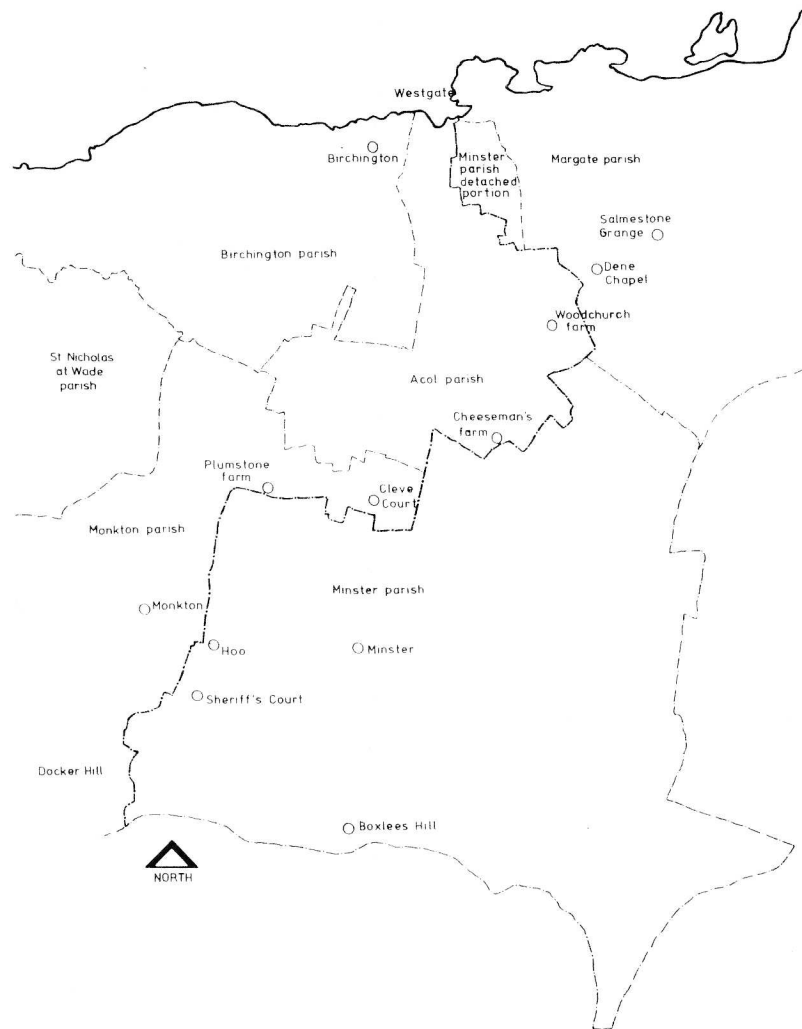


Fig. 2. Nineteenth-century Parish-boundaries in central Thanet.

rearrangement which gave them their present shape.⁶ Far from being an arbitrary line, the 'course of the hind' reflects with remarkable precision, although with some distortion, the various curves and turns of the nineteenth-century Minster parish-boundary itself from Docker Hill to a point south of Woodchurch Farm, then of the western boundary of Margate parish, and finally of the western boundary of a detached portion of Minster parish.

In Elmham's time, however, the parish of Minster seems to have been much larger than it was in the nineteenth century since the churches of St. John's (Margate), St. Peter's (Broadstairs) and St. Lawrence's (Ramsgate) were still listed as chapels of Minster in the sixteenth century, although they have subsequently acquired full parochial status.⁷ In the early fifteenth century when Elmham's map was drawn, Minster parish would therefore have embraced the parishes of Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate as they appear on the nineteenth-century maps and would thus have occupied the whole of the eastern part of the island. Its boundaries would have been the coastline of Thanet on two sides and the line shown by Elmham as the 'course of the hind' on the third.⁸ This is further confirmed by the survival into the nineteenth century of the detached portion of Minster parish at the north-western extremity of Margate parish, which provides tangible evidence that the latter had been carved out of Minster parish, leaving the detached portion as a remnant. The 'course of the hind' as Elmham drew it is therefore in fact probably the earliest representation of a parish-boundary in England and provides evidence that the Minster parish-boundary survived as a boundary (although

⁶ The only section of the nineteenth-century Minster parish-boundary which remains unchanged today is that from the Wantsum to the road just east of Cheeseeman's Farm. Birchington parish and the northern parts of Minster and Acol parishes have now been absorbed into an enlarged Margate parish.

⁷ *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, i (1810), 35. Further evidence of the subjection of these churches to the mother-church of Minster is given by John Lewis, *The History and Antiquities as well Ecclesiastical as Civil of the Isle of Thanet in Kent*, 2nd edn., (1736), 95-7, 122, 161 and 180-1. See also E. Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*, 2nd edn., 12 vols. (1797-1801), x, 351-2. These churches were probably parochial chapels so, although subject to Minster, they would have had their own parochial areas within Minster parish (see Hasted, *loc. cit.* above, and *The Register of St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, Commonly Called The Black Book*, ed. G.J. Turner and H.E. Salter, British Academy Records of Social and Economic History ii and iii (1915 and 1924), 14 and 35-44).

⁸ In the eighteenth century, Lewis had apparently reached this conclusion for he described a bank called 'St. Mildred's linch' and marked it on his map of Thanet in much the same position as the 'course of the hind' appears in Elmham's, stating that it was also the western boundary of Minster parish (*op. cit.* in note 7, 71-2 and Plate iii). In his time, the churches of Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs were fully parochial so he was presumably interpreting Elmham. Some of the place-names on his map correspond closely to those on Elmham's, suggesting that he may have had a copy of the latter beside him when he drew his own map.

divided between the new Margate parish and the reduced Minster parish) until the nineteenth century.

Elmham was not concerned with this line as a parish-boundary, however, but as the (in his view) miraculously inspired boundary of the estate granted to Domne Eafe in the seventh century. Whatever the truth of this, it does seem that the line represented the boundary of the estate of St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, on Thanet as it was in the fifteenth century, which was thus identical to the Minster parish-boundary. John Lewis, the eighteenth-century historian of Thanet, assumed this when he treated the boundary of Minster parish prior to the formation of Margate parish as identical to the boundary separating the manor of Minster, which was held by St. Augustine's Abbey, from the manor of Monkton, which was held by Christ Church, Canterbury.⁹ Elmham implied the same correlation when he marked *Baronia* on the Minster side of the 'course of the hind' and *Libertas* on the Monkton side, presumably referring to the barony or lordship of St. Augustine's Abbey and the liberty of Christ Church.¹⁰ This is further supported by the Black Book of St. Augustine's which assigns to that abbey only places lying on the Minster side of the 'course of the hind', thus tending to confirm that that line does represent the boundary of the St. Augustine's Abbey estate on Thanet in the fifteenth century as well as of Minster parish.¹¹

However, the monks of St. Augustine's Abbey evidently believed that, when they acquired this estate, it still represented the lands on Thanet which, according to the legend, had been granted in the seventh century by King Ecgberht to Domne Eafe for the foundation of Minster Abbey. This was the reason for their interest in the legend of the hind and for Elmham's inclusion of both legend and map in a history principally devoted to St. Augustine's Abbey. Elmham was in effect claiming that the boundary of the St. Augustine's Abbey estate, as represented by the 'course of the hind', dated from the seventh century and that the estate was in reality the original endowment of Minster. Now, although it is of course not necessary to accept the miraculous elements of the Minster legend as literally true, there is in fact a case for believing that Minster Abbey did indeed date from the seventh century and was in reality endowed by a grant of King Ecgberht to Domne Eafe. Firstly, a version of the Minster foundation-legend, now preserved in the 'History of the Kings' attributed (probably wrongly) to Symeon of Durham, is apparently founded on a text written less than a century after the alleged foundation and thus

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Hull, *op. cit.* in note 2.

¹¹ *Op. cit.* in note 7. 14 (Dene), 60 (Hengrove), 63 (Westgate) and 529 (Hoo), for example.

likely to have been based on genuine circumstances.¹² Secondly, the charters of Minster Abbey, preserved in late cartularies but almost certainly based on original documents, show the abbey in existence and holding lands on Thanet from the year 678 (only a few years after the death of Ecgberht) and name as its earliest abbess Aebba or Eaba, apparently a Latin form of Domne (i.e. Lady) Eafe.¹³ None of these charters is a foundation-charter so there may well have been an original oral grant by Ecgberht, of which the charters referring to various lands on Thanet are written confirmations by his successors. In the light of this, it is worth asking whether the claim of the St. Augustine's Abbey monks regarding the antiquity of their estate had any foundation.

The estate can in fact be traced back with some confidence to the eleventh century since Domesday Book divides Thanet between the western manor of Monkton (held by Christ Church) and the eastern manor of Minster (held by St. Augustine's Abbey) and thus describes a tenurial situation compatible with that represented by Elmham.¹⁴ The earliest account of how this manor or estate came into the possession of St. Augustine's Abbey is that of Goscelin, a monk of that house, who incorporated it into his 'Text Concerning the Translation of the Blessed Mildrith and the Institution of her Monastery', written c. 1090.¹⁵ According to Goscelin, Aelfstan, Abbot of St. Augustine's (1023x7-1045x6), acquired it by a grant of King Cnut (1016-35) and was in possession of it when he translated the relics of St. Mildrith, the second abbot of Minster, to his own abbey. The evidence for the date of this translation is equivocal: it could have occurred in either 1030 or 1035.¹⁶ However, there is no reason to doubt the substance of this account, written only a few decades after the event and in part confirmed by the text of an alleged writ of Cnut, which purports to

¹² *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, ed. T. Arnold, Rolls Series, 2 vols. (1882-5), ii, 3-13. On the date, see P. Hunter Blair, 'Some Observations on the "Historia Regum" Attributed to Symeon of Durham', N.K. Chadwick *et. al.*, *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the early British Border* (1964), 63-118; M. Lapidge, 'Byrhtferth of Ramsey and the early Sections of the "Historia Regum"' attributed to Symeon of Durham', forthcoming in *Medievalia et Humanistica*, new ser., x (1979); and Rollason, *op. cit.* in note 4, 33-9.

¹³ *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. W. de Gray Birch, 3 vols. (1885-93), for example nos. 35, 40, 41, 42, 44, 86, 88 and 96, on which see: F.E. Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (1952), 456-7; introduction to Turner and Salter, *op. cit.* in note 7; and Rollason, *op. cit.* in note 4, 418-46.

¹⁴ *Domesday Book*, i (1783), 4b and 12a.

¹⁵ 'Textus Translationis et Institutionis Monasterii Beatae Mildrethae cum Miraculorum Attestatione' in British Library, Cotton MS Vespasian B.xx, fos. 166-96, Harley MS 105, fos. 159-88 and Harley MS 3908, fos. 51-100. I am preparing an edition of this text.

¹⁶ See F. Barlow, 'Two Notes: Cnut's Second Pilgrimage and Queen Emma's Disgrace in 1043', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, lxxiii (1958), 650-1, where it is stated erroneously that Goscelin names the year as 1035 whereas he in fact specifies 1030. 1035 nevertheless seems the likelier date although 1030 is possible (Rollason, *op. cit.* in note 4, 197-8).

grant this estate to St. Augustine's Abbey and which, although not authentic in its present form, may well be based on a genuine original.¹⁷ Since there is no record of any subsequent grant to that abbey of land on Thanet, it is reasonable to suppose that the estate and the boundary were in existence by 1030 or 1035.

Goscelin makes it clear, however, that there had been a dispersal of the lands of Minster, which had by then ceased to be a monastic community and declined to the status of a parish-church. It emerges also that Abbot Aelfstan was consciously attempting to re-assemble Minster's former lands; for Goscelin describes how the abbot happened to acquire from an unnamed vendor half of these lands and was inspired by this to seek for his own abbey the remainder of the lands together with the relics of St. Mildrith. Goscelin's account, which is also corroborated by the reference in Cnut's writ to the lands and body of St. Mildrith, suggests then that the Thanet estate of St. Augustine's Abbey represented the lands of Minster prior to its destruction as a monastery. It is by no means impossible that Aelfstan was able to identify and re-assemble these lands since Minster probably survived as a monastic community of some sort until 1011 when Leofruna, apparently the last abbess, was captured by the Danes.¹⁸ Certainly, the extent of the St. Augustine's Abbey estate is compatible with a charter of 961 granting Monkton to Christ Church and suggesting that at that time Minster Abbey's lands can only have lain in the eastern part of Thanet, i.e. in the area delineated by Elmham's map as the manor and parish of Minster.¹⁹

There is some evidence to suggest that these lands held by the abbey prior to its destruction had remained unchanged, at least in broad outline, since the time of Minster's foundation in the seventh century. For an original charter of King Hlothhere, dated 679, records a grant to Berhtwald, Abbot of Reculver, of land on Thanet at *Uuestanae*.²⁰ This Old English word has often been interpreted as meaning 'west of the river'; but, since there is no river running across Thanet, it must in this context be derived from the Old English word for island, *eg*, and thus mean 'the western part of the island'.²¹ Such an interpretation

¹⁷ Harmer, *op. cit.* in note 13, 191-7 and no. 37. St. Augustine's Abbey's claim was challenged by St. Gregory's Priory, Canterbury, and the ensuing dispute is recorded in an eleventh-century tract published by M.L. Colker, 'A hagiographical Polemic', *Medieval Studies*, xxxix (1977), 60-108. See also Rollason, *op. cit.* in note 4, 203-9.

¹⁸ Arnold, *op. cit.* in note 12, ii, 143, and *Historiae Anglicanae Scriptores X*, ed. R. Twysden (1652), col. 1908. See also *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. J. Earle and C. Plummer, rev. D. Whitelock (1952), s.a. 1011, referring to the capture in Canterbury of an abbess called Leobwine, who may be the same person.

¹⁹ Birch, *op. cit.* in note 13, no. 1065.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no 45, on which see P. Chaplais, 'Some early Anglo-Saxon Diplomas on single Sheets: Originals or Copies?', *Journ. of the Soc. of Archivists*, iii (1965-9), 317-27.

²¹ On *eg*, see E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edn. (Oxford, 1960), s.v. *ea* and *eg*.

finds some corroboration in the fact that the church of Reculver still possessed rights over St. Nicholas-at-Wade in the western part of Thanet in the sixteenth century, at which period the church of St. Nicholas is said to have regarded Reculver as its mother-church and the vicar of St. Nicholas is recorded as owing a pension to Reculver.²² These ecclesiastical rights may well have originated when the monastery of Reculver actually held the western part of Thanet. If this is correct, Minster's estate in the seventh century can only have lain in the eastern part of the island, i.e. in the same general area as did the estate subsequently acquired by St. Augustine's Abbey. One of the early charters of Minster provides evidence in support of this for it names a place called *Haeg* as having been granted to Minster.²³ This name seems to correspond to the modern Haine in the eastern part of Thanet and also to the surname of a thirteenth-century tenant of St. Augustine's Abbey living on the Isle.²⁴ The charter may well relate, therefore, to the area of part of the Minster estate acquired later by Aelfstan.

Before accepting that the boundary represented by Elmham's 'course of the hind' was established in the seventh century, there are two apparent objections to be considered. Firstly, Elmham states in his account that the land granted to Domne Eafe by King Ecgerht consisted of forty-eight sulungs (or ploughlands).²⁵ The same figure is given for the original endowment in two eleventh-century texts, Goscelin's 'Life of St. Mildrith' and the Latin text of the legend of Minster in British Library, Cotton MS Vitellius A.ii, a manuscript which belonged to St. Augustine's Abbey; and it corresponds to the figure given for the manor of Minster in Domesday Book.²⁶ But a different figure is given by two earlier texts of the Minster legend, the Old English text 'Concerning the Saints Who Rest in England' (of which the Latin text in Cotton MS Vitellius A.ii is a modified Latin translation) and the Old English 'St. Mildrith'. The former, written in the tenth century, gives the original endowment of Minster as eighty sulungs and the latter, written in the tenth or early eleventh century, gives it as eighty hides.²⁷ Although in some cases one sulung seems to have equalled two hides, in other instances the two units were

²² Hasted, *op. cit.* in note 7, x, 245-7, and *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, i (1810), 34.

²³ Birch, *op. cit.* in note 13, no 96 (dated 696/7), on which see above, note 13.

²⁴ J.K. Wallenberg, *Kentish Place-Names* (1931), 25, and Turner and Salter, *op. cit.* in note 7, 529.

²⁵ *Op. cit.* in note 2, 208.

²⁶ Goscelin's 'Vita Deo Dilectae Mildrethae Virginis' is edited by myself, *op. cit.* in note 4, 325-417, and will be published shortly. For the text and date of the legend in Cotton MS Vitellius A.ii, see F. Liebermann, *Die Heiligen Englands* (1889), xvii and 4. For *Domesday Book*, see above, note 14.

²⁷ Liebermann, *op. cit.* in note 26, 3 and Swanton, *op. cit.* in note 2, 25. On the dates of composition, see Rollason, *op. cit.* in note 4, 48-53 and 65-70.

equivalent, and it is unlikely that any real difference was intended between these two accounts. It is more probable that some scribal error has resulted in the substitution in 'St. Mildrith' of the more common 'hides' for the peculiarly Kentish 'sulungs'.²⁸ If eighty sulungs were thus assigned to Minster's estate in the tenth century, the figure of forty-eight sulungs known to Elmham and found in the eleventh-century sources cannot have related to the original endowment of Minster. This objection is not, however, as serious as it might seem. For, if the sulung was in the pre-Conquest period a unit of assessment for the imposition of public burdens, such as military service, and not necessarily a unit expressing actual area, it is quite possible that an estate originally assessed at eighty sulungs should later have been re-assessed conventionally at forty-eight sulungs without any loss of actual area.²⁹ That there were indeed changes in the assessment of Thanet seems to be suggested by Bede's statement that the whole island contained in his time six hundred hides.³⁰ Even if one sulung was equivalent to two hides, this figure appears to be irreconcilable with either figure for Minster mentioned above and suggests that Bede was familiar with yet another assessment. The discrepancy between the forty-eight sulungs of the eleventh-century and later texts and the eighty sulungs of the earlier texts is therefore not in fact a serious obstacle to identifying the Thanet estate granted to St. Augustine's Abbey in the eleventh century with the earlier estate of Minster Abbey.

The second possible objection concerns Elmham's representation of Thunor's Pit. The problem is that the account of the legend in Goscelin's 'Life of St. Mildrith' relates that, after Thunor had been swallowed by the earth, a great mound was heaped up over him and the place was known by a name spelt in the Old English text, 'St. Mildrith', and in one of the earliest manuscripts of Goscelin's 'Life', British Library, Harley MS 3908, fo. 8v, as *Thunores hleaw(e)*, a name meaning 'Thunor's low' or 'mound'.³¹ Confusion evidently arose, however, between the old English letter *wyn*, representing 'w', and the letter 'p', since in another manuscript of Goscelin's 'Life', British Library, Cotton MS Vespasian B.xx, fo. 148r, it is spelt as *Thunoreshleap*. Elmham seems to have shared this confusion, since he clearly interpreted the name as meaning 'Thunor's leap' and hence 'pit'. Once this confusion had arisen, the site of the pit in which Thunor was supposed to have met his fate was associated with an actual pit,

²⁸ P. Vinogradoff, 'Sulung and Hide', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, xix (1904), 282-6, and F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ii (1906), 513-14.

²⁹ On the related unit, the hide, as a unit of assessment, see E. John, *Land Tenure in Early England* (1960), 30-1.

³⁰ *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book i, Chapter 25.

³¹ Swanton, *op. cit.* in note 2, 26. Swanton is in error regarding Goscelin's reading of this name (*id.* 16, note 10).

perhaps the chalk-pit known to have existed at about the point marked 'puteus Thunor' on Elmham's map.³² It follows that this particular feature of the map must be based on an association found no earlier than the late eleventh century when Cotton MS Vespasian B.xx was written. This is not, however, a serious objection to the boundary itself as much older than that, for legendary associations of this kind could have grown up at any time.

To conclude, it seems certain that the 'course of the hind' on Elmham's map corresponded to the boundary of the parish and manor of Minster in the early fifteenth century. It is very likely that this boundary delineated an estate which was held by Minster Abbey in the early eleventh century and there is a strong possibility that that estate existed already in the late seventh century when it formed the original endowment of Minster. The 'course of the hind' on Elmham's map may thus represent a boundary already over seven hundred years old when it was drawn and which survived as the western boundary of Minster and Margate parishes into the nineteenth century. Without Elmham's map, this attempt at dating the boundary could not have been made, nor could it have been suggested with any confidence that the large parish of Minster corresponded to the early estate of that abbey. How many other parishes and their boundaries would prove to have origins of comparable antiquity if we possessed more medieval maps as accurate as Elmham's?

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³² O.G.S. Crawford, 'Thunor's Pit', *Antiquity*, vii (1933), 92-4.