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## Support For the Sick Poor in Anglo-Saxon England

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One thing is universally true about medicine: healthcare does not come cheap, and in Anglo-Saxon England expenditure was present in every aspect of healing, from medicating, to treating, to long-term care. Such expenditure may have been devastating to those close to the edge of subsistence, meaning that illness had as much a financial effect as a physical one. So what support, if any, was available to individuals for whom the financial strain was too much? The attention of scholars has largely fallen on the role of the Church in providing charity, yet charity distributed by individuals directly to the poor certainly existed in Anglo-Saxon England, and has been vastly under-studied. This paper will assess the degree to which such private donation can be seen as a viable support network for the poor and sick poor in Anglo-Saxon England: how accessible was it to the poor, and to what degree could the poor rely on such donations to mitigate the financial hardships inherent in illness? Before this can be examined, however, it is first necessary to determine what such hardships may have been.

One financial barrier that illness presented was the cost associated with the procurement of ingredients for compounding treatments. Not only did many Mediterranean ingredients have to be obtained by trade,<sup>2</sup> but even ingredients which were widely available in England required investment. As a particularly visible example, the majority of remedies in *Bald's Leechbook* and the *Lacnunga*, the two main vernacular collections of medical remedies, require ingredients to be dissolved in a limited number of standard solvents, of which the most common were: wine, beer (various kinds), honey, milk,

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<sup>2</sup> The classic example is pepper, which is called for in a number of remedies, e.g. remedies V and VI in the *Lacnunga* and had to be imported from the East, see: Pettit, E. *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library Ms Harley 585: The Lacnunga*, 2 vols. (Lewiston. 2001) vol.1, p.4. For more on trade and importation of ingredients, see: Voigts, L. E. 'Anglo-Saxon Plant Remedies and the Anglo-Saxons' *Isis*, vol.70. (1979) p.259-61; Cameron, M. L. 'Bald's *Leechbook*: Its Sources and Their Uses in Its Compilation' *Anglo-Saxon England*, vol.12. (1983) p.175; and Banham, D. 'Arestolobius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem and the Bark that comes from Paradise: What did the Orient mean to the Compilers of Old English Medical Collections?' in Sari N., Bayat A. H., Ülman Y. and Işin M. (eds.) *Proceedings of the 38th International Congress on the History of Medicine*. (Ankara. 2005) pp.459-68.

butter, animal fats of various kinds, oil, vinegar, or water.<sup>3</sup> Honey was a common staple in food rents,<sup>4</sup> suggesting that the lower classes had access to it, but also that it had a fiscal value. On the other hand, full-fat milk, wine, butter, and oil were ingredients which were expensive and generally available only to the upper classes – Banham points out that butter was associated with the lord’s table in at least one text,<sup>5</sup> while Hagen notes that one pound of butter would have required twenty to thirty pints of milk to make;<sup>6</sup> as well, only the wealthy could afford to drink full-fat milk, rather than turning it into other products like cheese;<sup>7</sup> and finally, wine and oil were available mainly or entirely through importation, though they were available more widely as liturgical substances, and some monasteries may have made their own wine, again for liturgical purposes.<sup>8</sup> The inability to access even one of these ingredients made large swaths of the corpus of remedies unusable – wine, for example, appears in 57/155 chapters (37%) of *Bald’s Leechbook*, by Banham’s count.<sup>9</sup> None of these barriers were insurmountable – some substitutions were available, for example, and Cameron has suggested that several remedies were listed in the texts for each ailment to allow individuals to select the remedy which suited their available resources.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, this demonstrates that obtaining medication implied significant fiscal sacrifice.

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<sup>3</sup> For examples see: *Bald’s Leechbook* [BLB] I.ii.16 (wine), I.ii.19 (beer), I.i.3 (honey), I.iii.5 (milk), I.ii.16 (butter), I.iii.4 (animal fats), I.i (oil), I.iii.11 (vinegar), I.i.4 (water) in *Bald’s Leechbook* in Cockayne, C. T. O. (ed. and trans.) *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England. Being a Collection of Documents, for the Most Part Never Before Printed, Illustrating the History of Science in This Country Before the Norman Conquest*, vol. 2 (London. 1864) p.18, p.34, p.40, p.41, p.42.

<sup>4</sup> Hagen, A. *Anglo-Saxon Food and Drink. Production, Processing, Distribution & Consumption* (Norfolk. 2006) pp.153-4. For example see: ‘Rectitudines Singularum Personarum’ 4.5 *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*. Liebermann, F. (ed.) (Halle. 1903-6) pp.444-53, p.447).

<sup>5</sup> Banham, D. *Food and Drink in Anglo-Saxon England*. (Stroud. 2004) p.56. For more on this, see: Banham, D. and Faith, R. *Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming*. (Oxford. 2014) p.112.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.263.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p.259.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p.220.

<sup>9</sup> Banham, D. ‘Knowledge and Uses of Food Plants in Anglo-Saxon England’, Unpublished PhD Thesis. (Cambridge University. 1990) p.149.

<sup>10</sup> Cameron, M. L. *Anglo-Saxon Medicine [Medicine]* (Cambridge. 1993) p.102. However, remedies which list substitutions suggest that certain ingredients were seen as more effective than others. For example, one *Bald’s Leechbook* remedy states ‘seethe all of the herbs in water, milk is better’(all translations mine unless otherwise indicated)/‘wyl þa wyrta ealle on wætere meoluc bið selre’ *BLB*. I.ii.13; all of the ingredients substitutions which are explicitly listed in the *Leechbook* follow the same construction: ‘seethe in milk, in butter is better’/‘wyl on meolce on buteran is betere’ *BLB* I.ii.22; ‘grind the herbs to fine dust. Put in *beor* or in wine or, if need be, in milk if you have none of the others’/‘grind to duste þa wyrta swiþe. do on beor swa on win swa on þeorfe meoluc gif þu þara oþerra nawþer næbbe’ *BLB* II.ii.

Moreover other kinds of care, besides remedies alone, were also necessary in illness. In the case of long term illness, nursing a sick individual meant either paying a nurse,<sup>11</sup> whether in fees or through room and board, or diverting a family member, at least partially, from other tasks – and being far enough from the edge of subsistence to be able to spare his or her labour. How much labour this requires is obvious to anyone who has ever cared for a sick relative, but is also occasionally represented in the literature: for example, Bede tells us about attendants watching the sick day and night,<sup>12</sup> and the *Vita Sancti Cuthberti* describes an individual who had to be carried on a litter.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, long-term illness obviously also has an effect on an individual’s ability to earn a living. Of course, the effect of these circumstances would have varied case by case – large families or those who were better off would have been able to pool resources, share the work among female members, or perhaps attend to the sick alongside other tasks, or hire a nurse, as well as support a family member who could not work. The same would have been impossible for individuals with less recourse to family or community support networks.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, then as now, certain problems required the expertise of a doctor. This is obvious from passages like the following from *Bald’s Leechbook*, which requires a number of specialist procedures:

First of all in the disease shall one always let blood from the veins. After this shall one give a herbal drink and heal the sore place. If this disease should come from great heat then shall one heal with cold leechdoms. If it from comes from cold causes then shall one treat it with hot leechdoms...<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> As in the case of Dunstan, cf. *B. Vita Dunstani* [VSD] in Lapidge, M. and Winterbottom, M. (eds.) *The Early Lives of St Dunstan* (Oxford. 2012), pp.1-10, p.14.

<sup>12</sup> Bede. ‘Historia Ecclesiastica’ [HE] IV.viii in Plummer, C. (ed.) *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica* (Oxford. 1896) pp.220-1.

<sup>13</sup> *Auctore Anonymo Vita Cuthberti* [VCAA] IV.v in Colgrave, B. (ed. and trans.) *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert*. (Cambridge. 1985) pp.116-18.

<sup>14</sup> For more on this see: Crawford, S. and Lee, C. *Social Dimensions of Medieval Disease and Disability*, Studies in Early Medicine vol.3. (Oxford. 2014); Metzler, I. *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking About Physical Impairment During the High Middle Ages, c. 1100-1400*. (London. 2006); and Shahar, S. *Growing Old in the Middle Ages* (London. 1997).

<sup>15</sup> ‘sio adl cymð of yfelre wætan ufan flowendre oþþe æþme oþþe of bam. Ponne sceal mon ærest on ða adle forewardre blod lætan of ædre. Æfter þon sceal man wyrnt drenc sellan ond lacnian

Carrying out these instructions presumes knowing how to bleed a patient, select and compound the appropriate treatment, and assess the humoral cause of the disease – all of which require specialist knowledge.<sup>16</sup> That this was seen as specialist even in the Anglo-Saxon period is clear from Bede’s account of John of Beverly healing a nun whose arm swelled up and began to hurt after she had been bled. When John was brought to her, he ‘asked [the abbess], when the girl had been bled, and when he found out that in the fourth luration, said: “you have acted very foolishly and ignorantly...”<sup>17</sup> There is the sense here that some things are best left up to experts.

This adds financial strain. First of all, physicians charged fees. These are mentioned clearly in the so-called *Confessionale Pseudo-Ecgberti* or *Scrifiboc*, which stipulates that one who injures another in the groin or face must do his work for him and ‘give the physician’s fee to the physician’.<sup>18\*</sup> Of course, how common or how high such fees were is impossible to determine. This alone, therefore, would have set a financial threshold on healing. Likewise, episodes of healing in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Vita Sancti Cuthberti* seem to suggest that the wealthy had more access to healing than the poor even

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sipþan þa saran stowa. Gif seo adl sie cumen of micelre hæto þonne sceal man mid cealdum læcedomum lacnian. Gif hio of cealdum intingan cymð þonne sceal mon mid hatum læcedomum lacnian’ *BLB* I.ii.12-13

<sup>16</sup> For more on this, see: Van Arsdall, A. ‘Medical Training in Anglo-Saxon England: An Evaluation of the Evidence’ in Lendinara, P., Lazzari, L., D’Aronco M. A. (eds.) *Form and Content of Instruction in Anglo-Saxon England in the light of Contemporary Manuscript Evidence*. (Turnhout. 2007). This is also explored more fully in my PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, forthcoming.

<sup>17</sup> ‘interrogans autem ille, quando flebotomata esset puella, et ut cognouit, quia in luna quarta dixit: “multum insipienter et indocte fecistis...”’ Bede *HE*. V.iii. It should be noted that the above translation is my own, with a correction from one of the anonymous reviewers.

<sup>18</sup> ‘þæt leocefeoh ðam lece gylde’ XIX, as noted in Oliver, L. ‘Sick Maintenance in Anglo-Saxon Law’ [‘Sick’] *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol.107, no.3. (2008) pp.303-26. This seems to appear also in Latin penitentials which instruct the culprit to pay ‘impensas in medicos’ or ‘impensas in medicum’, see: Oliver. ‘Sick’ p.316 n.44, p.317. The latter phrase may be translated as ‘expenses to the physician’, which seems to imply fees, though both phrases can be understood more broadly and the former phrase can be construed as referring to more general medical expenses as, for example, in Oliver. ‘Sick’ p.317. There are also texts which do not reference fees directly, but imply them. For example, ‘Alfred’ Prologue.16 [in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*. Liebermann, F. (ed.) (Halle. 1903-6) pp.32-3] has another clause that may refer to fees, stating: ‘If one should strike his neighbour with a stone or with a fist, and he may nonetheless go out with a staff, obtain a physician for him and do his work which he cannot [do] himself/’gif hwa slea his ðone nehstan mid stane oððe mid fyste, & he þeah utgongan mæge bi stafe, begite him læce & wyrce his weorc ða hwile þe he self ne mæge’. It is unclear whether ‘obtain’ here is a roundabout way for saying ‘commission’, but the law does not name fees directly. Rubin [in Rubin, S. ‘The Medical Practitioner in Anglo-Saxon England’ *Journal of the Royal College of Practitioners*, vol.2. (1970) p.65] and others following him, have found evidence for physician’s fees in law 62 of Æþelbert’s code, see: ‘Æþelberht’ in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*. Liebermann, F. (ed.) (Halle. 1903-6) p.6, which reads ‘gif man gegemed weorðeþ, XXX scill gebete’, ‘if one should be healed, repay with thirty shillings’. However, it is not clear that this law implies physician’s fees specifically.

at the hands of ecclesiastical personnel. For example, of the five individuals Bede tells us John of Beverly healed, two were part of the households of *comites* whose Churches he was sent to dedicate,<sup>19</sup> and two are ecclesiastics themselves.<sup>20</sup> He treats only one individual with no financial or personal connection to the church, ‘a certain mute youth, who was known to the bishop because he had been accustomed to often come before him for the sake of receiving alms’.<sup>21</sup> It is true that saints’ lives are idealistic and prescriptive texts, which do not entirely mirror reality. However, often part of that saintly ideal is the saints’ charitable nature, and Cuthbert is praised for ‘possessing... that most eminent of all gifts, charity... [and] tending to the care of the poor’, praise which is also copied word for word and ascribed to Wilfrid in Stephen of Ripon’s *Vita*.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, that even in hagiography the wealthy have a disproportionate degree of access to healthcare suggests that this was part of the Anglo-Saxon reality, rather than an author’s ideal. This overview should provide an idea of some of the financial strains involved in illness in the Anglo-Saxon period. In normal circumstances, individuals could turn to ordinary support networks – the kin and the lord – to alleviate some of this strain. Yet these support networks cannot always have functioned properly, and indeed references to the poor in laws, donations, and saints’ lives demonstrate that there were, as common sense would suggest, individuals who were unable to benefit from such ordinary support.<sup>23</sup> When sick, such individuals would have had difficulty procuring the resources they needed in their illness, and may also have had to make financial sacrifices which would have brought them closer to destitution. So where could such individuals have turned for help?

On the continent, as well as in the Anglo-Norman period and later in England, the poor could turn to hospitals. As Orme and Webster point out, these did occasionally offer medical care, but in reality were more often focused on providing charity to the poor, and to the sick poor in particular.<sup>24</sup> Their functions encompassed: long-term

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<sup>19</sup> *HE* V.iv, V.v.

<sup>20</sup> *HE* V.iii, V.vi.

<sup>21</sup> ‘quidam adulescens mutus, episcopo notus, nam saepius ante illum percipiendae elemosynae gratia uenire consueuerat’ *HE* V.ii.

<sup>22</sup> *VCAA* IV.ii, and ‘Tenens quoque...illam supereminentem omnibus donis caritatem...curam pauperum gerens’ *Vita Sancti Wilfridi*.xi, see: Stephen of Ripon. *Vita Sancti Wilfridi* in Colgrave, B. (ed.) *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge. 1927).

<sup>23</sup> For example: ‘Æthelstans Almosenverordnung’ in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*. Liebermann, F. (ed.) (Halle. 1903-6) p.148; the will of Alfred (discussed below); and *HE* V.ii.

<sup>24</sup> Orme, N. and Webster, M. *The English Hospital 1070-1570. [Hospital]* (London. 1995) p.57. For an overview of similar structures on the continent during the Anglo-Saxon period, see: Dey, H. W.

maintenance of the infirm; medium-term care of the sick; distribution of alms to the poor; short-term hospitality to travellers; support for education and poor students.<sup>25</sup> Significantly, these functions address all of the fiscal ‘danger zones’ which this article has identified above, in providing both care and alms to offset any financial difficulties already incurred. Therefore although the non-medical functions were directed at the poor generally, they were perfectly suited to mitigate the economic hardships of sickness as well.

However, there is very little evidence for hospitals in Anglo-Saxon England. There are only two potential hospital sites that have been identified, though the possibility remains that more may be found archaeologically. There is the tenuous claim of St Leonard’s of York that it was founded through King Athelstan’s gift of thraves to the monastic foundation that stood there before, as discussed by Cullum.<sup>26</sup> Cullum argues that this gift would have resulted in the monastery providing fiscal support for the poor, but that this did not establish a hospital as such with its full functions. On the other hand, there is archaeological evidence for a hospital-like site at Nazeingbury, Essex, as skeletal remains at the site show a high concentration of individuals with severe or unique illnesses.<sup>27</sup> This is, however, the only site of its kind so far discovered from Anglo-Saxon England, and moreover, has no corroborating documentary evidence.<sup>28</sup> That so

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‘*Diaconiae, Xenodochia, Hospitalia* and Monasteries: “Social Security” and the Meaning of Monasticism in Early Medieval Rome’ *Early Medieval Europe*, vol.16, no.4. (2008) pp.398-422; and Horden, P. ‘The Earliest Hospitals in Byzantium, Western Europe, and Islam’ *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol.35, no.3. (2005) pp.361-89.

<sup>25</sup> Orme and Webster. *Hospital*. p.57.

<sup>26</sup> Cullum, P. H. ‘Hospitals and Charitable Provision in Medieval Yorkshire, 936-1547’, Unpublished PhD Thesis (University of York. 1989) pp.69-71.

<sup>27</sup> cf. Huggins, P. J. ‘Excavation of Belgic and Romano-British Farm with Middle Saxon Cemetery and Churches at Nazeingbury, Essex, 1975-6’ *Essex Archaeology and History*, vol.10. (1978) p.29-117. The medical problems ran the gamut from relatively common conditions such as leprosy and tuberculosis to many cases of more unusual or severe disabilities, such as the eight individuals with overly robust bones or the two with gracile bones, and the individual with Down’s syndrome who also suffered from, according to the authors, an ‘impossible’ set of teeth.

<sup>28</sup> Another possible site is a concentration of 35 (1/180 = 19.5%) burials at the cemetery of St John (Timberhill), Norwich which have been carbon dated to the Anglo-Saxon period and show signs of leprosy, see: Roffey, S. and Tucker, K. ‘A Contextual Study of the Medieval Hospital and Cemetery of St Mary Magdalen, Winchester, England’ *International Journal of Palaeopathology*, vol.2. (2012) pp.174; Shepherd Popescu, E. *Norwich Castle: Excavations and Historical Survey, 1987-98, Part I: Anglo-Saxon to c.1345*, East Anglian Archaeology vol.132. (Dereham, 2009); I am grateful to Dr. Roffey for pointing me to this excavation]. As Roffey points out, there may have been more individuals at the site suffering from skin conditions which Anglo-Saxons may have attributed to leprosy. However, it should be noted that known leper hospitals have tested at much higher percentages of leprosy incidence, see: Roffey, S. ‘Medieval Leper Hospitals in England: An Archaeological Perspective’ *Medieval Archaeology*, vol.56. (2012) pp.216-17.

few hospital sites have thus far been identified, suggesting that if hospitals existed they were not commonly or widely available. So what recourse was there for the sick poor in this period? If the poor could not rely on hospitals for donations of food, clothing, or even money, then where could they turn?

Horden has noted that the earliest hospitals in late antiquity were ‘an intensification or solidification of one part of a blurred spectrum of hospital-like provisions’<sup>29</sup> scattered among a variety of institutions and sources. If there were few hospitals in Anglo-Saxon England, then it is that spectrum of provisions that must be the focus of any investigation of additional medical care and fiscal support to those who could not draw on kin or lord. Private donations were part of this spectrum alongside Church involvement in communities and legal administration. Such donations are especially interesting in providing either food or liquid wealth, as will be noted below – and thereby would have helped to either feed the sick poor, or provide the necessary finances for acquiring physicians or *materia medica*; in other words, such donations directly address the financial aspect of sickness. That these kinds of handouts were incorporated into the functions of continental or Anglo-Norman hospitals underscores this. Less clear is the degree to which such support was accessible and available to the sick poor. If we are to postulate that it was a piece of the puzzle of Anglo-Saxon social support, then the question becomes how big a piece it was.

Yet, scholarship has largely looked at private donations only in the context of gifts to monasteries, or within the textual study of wills – donation to the poor has not been studied as fully from the perspective of social support. Wills, however, remain the best texts through which to view such donations. As speech-acts, wills are also the closest glimpse we can have of ‘what actually happened’ – written as records of acts taken or about to be undertaken, they are far clearer mirrors of reality than normative texts such as laws or saints’ lives. They therefore provide a unique glimpse of the ways in which and how often private donations were made and may have eventually reached the poor, and they will form the case study in this paper.

Gifts in wills rarely single out the sick specifically, but as in the case of hospitals, support for poverty would have helped the sick poor by redressing the economic effects of illness which were outlined above. Likewise, texts in the Anglo-Saxon period show the poor and

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<sup>29</sup> Horden, P. ‘The Earliest Hospitals in Byzantium’ p.378.



sick poor both benefitting from the same single acts of charity, as in King Æþelred's seventh lawcode, which commands that meat which is not consumed during a fast be given to 'all needy and bedridden men and men who are so injured that they cannot fast in this way',<sup>30</sup> demonstrating that one single act of donation was understood to benefit both groups. For this reason, it is impossible and not very useful to separate the two, and I will discuss private charity generally, before discussing the more specific implications. I will also not be discussing gifts to ecclesiastical foundations. A portion of such gifts may have eventually made their way into the hands of the poor, as tithe and other church dues were in theory meant to be divided into three parts by the recipient, with one part earmarked for the support of the poor.<sup>31</sup> However, the degree to which such stipulations were followed is unclear. Nor is it clear whether the customary division of dues applied also to gifts. All of these factors mean that such gifts confuse the picture of support to the poor. Moreover, support for the poor was not their primary intention. For all of these reasons, such gifts will be excluded in this paper.

So what do the wills tell us? This paper draws on a corpus of seventy wills, which is the full body of authentic wills extant from Anglo-Saxon England. I have compiled it by combining the corpuses gathered by Whitelock, Lowe, Crick, and Tollerton, and supplementing them through additional research in the Sawyer catalogue of Anglo-Saxon charters. Due to survival bias, these surviving wills are mostly confined to the South-East of England, and span from the ninth to the eleventh centuries. This means that they represent only a small part of Anglo-Saxon England both geographically and chronologically, and this paper will attempt to extrapolate from the available data to those periods and areas from which no wills survive. There are five types of charitable gift represented in the wills: manumission and gifts to newly manumitted servants, represented in 25 out of 70 wills; posthumous distribution of gifts to the poor, in 10 out of 70 wills; gifts to servants, in 4 out of 70 wills; and forgiveness of debt, in 2 out of 70 wills. I will not be discussing manumission and gifts to slaves in this paper, as this is a complicated special case.

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<sup>30</sup> 'eal þearfigendum mannum 7 bedridan 7 swa gebrocedum mannum, þe swa fæstan ne magon' 'VII Æþelred'4.1 in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*. Liebermann, F. (ed.) (Halle. 1903-6) pp.260-1.

<sup>31</sup> For example: 'Report of the Legates George and Theophylact of their Proceedings in England' in *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 3. Haddan, A. W. and Stubbs, W. (eds.) (Oxford. 1871) pp.456-6.

The most unusual – and also the most problematic – of these are gifts to servants and forgiveness of debt. Both of these seem to suggest a type of charity which was only occasionally directed towards the poor.

There are four instances of gifts to servants: the wills of Ealdorman Æþelmær, S 1498 (971x972/3); Archbishop Ælfric, S 1489 (1003/4); Thurstan, S 1531, (1042x1043); Wulf, S 1532 (1050). With the exception of Archbishop Ælfric, who uses the word *stiwardas*, the word that editors translate as ‘servants’ in each case is *hiredcniht*. However, this translation is somewhat problematic. *Cniht* is defined by the *Dictionary of Old English* [DOE] as ‘1. male child; boy; young man... 2. boy employed as servant; hence generally male servant, attendant, retainer of any age’,<sup>32</sup> so this need not necessarily refer to ‘servants’ in the modern sense, but can rather be applied to followers more generally. *Hired*, likewise, can refer to a household,<sup>33</sup> it can also mean ‘a company, band of associates’,<sup>34</sup> particularly as in the Viking *hired* could take on martial connotations as a semantic loan from OIc. *huskarl*, ‘house-carl, man-servant; pl. the king’s men, his body-guard’, as Pons-Sanz points out.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, as Gautier has pointed out, the difference between a servant and a retainer was a sliding spectrum, rather than a firm division, as positions such as cupbearer and chamberlain came to take on connotations of governance and become noble positions.<sup>36</sup> Therefore gifts identified as being intended for *hiredcniht* may refer to gifts to high-status retainers as much as lower-class servants.

The particular bequests reflect both definitions. Wulf, especially, almost certainly intended his gift to go to high status retainers, as he states ‘otherwise a horse to each of my household servants who have no land’;<sup>37</sup> both the assumption that they should otherwise possess land themselves, and the honourable and relatively expensive gift of a horse suggests that higher-status recipients are meant. The other gifts bestowed in this

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<sup>32</sup> ‘cniht’, definitions 1-2, in Cameron, A., Amos, A. C., Healey, A. D., et. al. (eds.) *The Dictionary of Old English. A-G Online*. <doe.utoronto.ca/st/index.html> August, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> ‘hired’, in Bosworth, J. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*. Toller T. N., Christ, S. and Tichý, O. (eds.) <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/006460> August 2014.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>35</sup> Pons-Sanz, S. ‘Norse-Derived Terms and Structures in *The Battle of Maldon*’ *Journal of English and Germanic Studies*, vol.107. (2008) p.435.

<sup>36</sup> Gautier, pers. comm. I am grateful to Drs. A. Gautier, R. Dance and D. Banham for their guidance here.

<sup>37</sup> ‘elles ælc minra hiredcnihta an hors þe nan land nabbap’ S 1532 in *Charters of St. Alban’s* [*Charters*], Anglo-Saxon Charters 12. Crick, J. (ed. & trans.) (Oxford. 2007). p.199.

way are five pounds<sup>38</sup>, forty pounds<sup>39</sup>, and a wood.<sup>40</sup> This last is particularly significant, as one piece of land, held in common by all servants, is unlikely to have been a gift fit for retainers. Unlike the gift of a horse, it is perhaps more likely that it was meant for those in the lower ranks of society, and might have even benefited the very poor.

Similarly complicated is the forgiveness of debt. There are two instances of this in the wills drawn up within a few years of one another: the first in the will of Archbishop Ælfric, dated to 1003 or 1004, which forgives the debt to Kent as a whole, perhaps, though it does not state so explicitly, in order to allow them to pay off invading viking armies. While it could have been significant to Kent's economy, not to mention safety, it works on a large scale, and would not have provided any specific relief to the destitute. The second example of forgiveness of debt is in the will of Wulfgeat, dated c. 1006,<sup>41</sup> and states that 'he grants a year's rent to his men as a gift. May they who succeed to land there enjoy the income according as they carry out the charitable bequests'.<sup>42</sup> This was of more direct benefit to those dependant on the testator, or rather on his heirs, and would have had quite a significant impact on the quality of life for those individuals for that year. Even more significant are the strings attached that they are expected to pay the charity forward, and engage in charitable gifts themselves. This gift would, therefore, at least in theory, have trickled down the ranks and may have even reached the destitute, though there is nothing here to preclude these individuals from donating to the church.

These few examples are interesting, as they show that forms of donation which were not charitable in and of themselves could be redirected for charitable purposes. Such gifts would have benefited the sick poor in various ways – gifts from the lord would have provided liquid wealth which could have been put to medical purposes, while forgiveness of debt would have relieved other financial burdens which may have contributed to dire circumstances during sickness. However, it is significant to note that these forms of support operate within a normally functioning lord-servant relationship, so while they may have been extremely helpful to the poorer members of an estate, they

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<sup>38</sup> S 1498 in *Wills*. pp.24-7.

<sup>39</sup> S 1489 in *Wills*. pp.70-3.

<sup>40</sup> S 1531 in *Wills*. pp.81-5.

<sup>41</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Wills* [*Wills*]. Whitelock, D. (ed. & trans.) (Cambridge. 1930) p.54.

<sup>42</sup> '7 he geann anes geares gafol hi monnum to gyfe. Swa heo þa are brucon swa heo þa ælmeſſan gelæſtan þa ðer to londe foð' S 1534 in *Wills*. pp.54-5.

would not have helped those who could not rely on the support of their lord in the first instance.

A better attested form of charity is the posthumous distribution of gifts to the poor. This could take the form of a donation of a particular sum to be divided among the poor in unspecified increments, as in the gift of Bishop Theodred which states ‘I grant to every bishop’s see five pounds to be distributed’.<sup>43</sup> Or, a less specific gift that follows from other conditions in the will, as in the will of Ælfgifu, ‘[I wish] that I may entrust the surplus to the Bishop and the Abbot... for them to distribute for me among the poor men’.<sup>44</sup> Or, in one case in the will of Æþelstan Æþeling, of a distribution of food specifically: ‘and I wish that each year there shall be paid one day’s food-rent from this property to the community at Ely...and a hundred poor people fed there on that day’.<sup>45</sup> As these examples show, such donations ran the gamut from highly symbolic acts to a distribution of otherwise surplus property. Such gifts would not only have helped sustain the destitute, but could have also been used by their recipients to pay for *materia medica* or other medical necessities.

There are, overall, ten examples of this kind of gift in Anglo-Saxon England. So what patterns can we see? No geographical patterns emerge, and the lands mentioned and bequeathed by various testators show significant overlap, but also cover the entire south-east of England, that is, the provenance of the extant wills. In terms of individuals, the most helpful pattern would of course be among recipients, but these are generally identified simply as ‘earn’, poor. As well, only five wills describe where this distribution is to take place (and therefore who was part of the pool of recipients). Two of these are the wills of Alfred and Eadred, who as kings distribute widely throughout their kingdoms. The other two are Theodred, who distributes among his own bishoprics, and Æþelflæd, who distributes ‘in each town’,<sup>46</sup> presumably on her own land, though she does not specify. The final one is Æþelstan Æþeling, above. The rest of the donations do not specify at all.

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<sup>43</sup> ‘ic an into euri bisscopes stole fif pund to delen’ S 1526 (AD 942x951) in *Wills*. pp.4-5.

<sup>44</sup> ‘þæt ic motæ bætæcen þam bisceope. And þam abbodæ...earnum mannum for me to dælænne’ S 1526 in *Wills*. pp.20-3.

<sup>45</sup> ‘7 Ic wylle. Þæt mon gelæste ælce geare ane dægfeorme þam hirede into Elig of þysse are...7 gefede þær on þone dæg. C. þearfena’ S 1503 (dated to 1015) in *Wills*. pp.58-9.

<sup>46</sup> ‘on ælcum tune’ S 1503 in *Wills*. p.36.

The other individuals who are involved in writing and carrying out a will could also be indicative, through extrapolation, of potential recipients. However, there are no patterns among the other individuals involved. Some donations are handled by bishops,<sup>47</sup> but equally by spouses<sup>48</sup> or other beneficiaries.<sup>49</sup> In terms of gender, there are more male donors than female ones,<sup>50</sup> but this could be as much a result of gendered power over property as any pattern in charitable donation. In any case, a slight difference in numbers within a sample of twelve testators is hardly evidence for gender bias.

In regards to status, reeves,<sup>51</sup> kings,<sup>52</sup> consorts,<sup>53</sup> ealdormen,<sup>54</sup> and bishops<sup>55</sup> are all represented in the list of donors. Of course, those in greater positions of power appear more frequently than those of lesser status, but both ends of the social scale are represented. Likewise, the group of female testators noted above is comprised of two reeves' wives and two royal women. Moreover, while the first donation is by the reeve Æþelnoþ and his wife Gænbuurg in 805,<sup>56</sup> the next is by King Alfred the Great,<sup>57</sup> in 873x888. That is, a king and a reeve are the only individuals in the ninth century to give posthumous gifts to the poor, suggesting that status was simply not a factor. Had they been in the opposite order, this may perhaps have been a sign of aspirational copying of a form of donation, a reeve following a pattern set by his betters. Since it was a reeve first and then a king, this may not have been the case. It also suggests that this kind of donation did not begin in the ninth century.

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<sup>47</sup> In the wills of Æþelnoð and Gænbuurg (S 1500), King Eadred (S 1515), and Ælfgifu (S 1484) in *Diplomatarium Anglicanum Aevi Saxonici* [Diplomatarium]. Thorpe, B. (ed). (London. 1865). pp.462-3.

<sup>48</sup> The will of Ealdorman Ælfheah (S 1485) in *Wills*. pp.22-5.

<sup>49</sup> The wills of Ealdorman Æþelwold (S 1504) in *Diplomatarium*. pp.499-500; Brihtric and Ælfswið (S 1511) in *Wills*. pp.26-9; Thurstan (S 1530) in *Wills*. pp.78-9.

<sup>50</sup> Four female testators: Gænbuurg (S 1500) in *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition [ASCharters]. Robertson, A. J. (ed.) (Cambridge. 1956) p.4; Ælfgifu (S 1484) in *Wills*. pp.20-3; Æþlflæd (S 1494) in *Wills*. pp.34-7; and Ælfswið (S 1511) in *Wills*. pp.26-9. As compared to nine male testators: Æþelnoþ (S 1500) in ASCharters. p.4; King Alfred (S 1507) in *Diplomatarium*. pp.484-92; Bishop Theodred (S 1526) in *Wills*. pp.2-5; Ealdorman Æþelwold (S 1504) in *Diplomatarium*. pp.499-500; King Eadred (S 1515) in *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* [Documents]. Harmer, F. E. (ed.) (Cambridge. 1914). pp.34-5, pp.64-5; Ealdorman Ælfheah (S 1485) in *Wills*. pp.22-5; and Brihtric (S 1511) in *Wills*. pp.26-9.

<sup>51</sup> Æþelnoð (S 1500) in ASCharters. p.4; Brihtric (S 1511) in *Wills*. pp.26-9.

<sup>52</sup> Kings Alfred (S 1507) in *Diplomatarium*. pp.484-92; Eadred (S 1515) in *Documents*. pp.34-5, 64-5.

<sup>53</sup> Ælfgifu (S 1484) in *Wills*. pp.20-3; Æþelflæd (S 1494) in *Wills*. pp.34-7.

<sup>54</sup> Æþelwold (S 1504) in *Diplomatarium*. pp.499-500; Ælfheah (S 1485) in *Wills*. pp.22-5.

<sup>55</sup> Theodred (S 1526) in *Wills*. pp.2-5.

<sup>56</sup> S 1500 in ASCharters. p.4.

<sup>57</sup> S 1507 in *Diplomatarium*. pp.384-92.

In the absence of more specific information on the recipients of gifts, the motivations behind donation may further give a clue as to who may have benefited from such donations. The corpus demonstrates a variety of motivations. *Æþelnoþ* and *Gænburg*'s donation reads 'if they should not have a child then...then let [Bishop Wulfred] receive that land and pay for it and distribute that worth for their souls...'<sup>58</sup> That this should happen only in the absence of heirs is significant. The sense here is that this is an attempt to make the best of property which can no longer benefit the family – charity is not the primary object in itself, but a way of putting property that cannot otherwise be distributed to good use and spiritual return. While charity was clearly valued here, it was not a primary concern in and of itself.

King Alfred's will, on the other hand, possibly hints at political motivations. The will lists among bequests to others of his subjects: 'I bequeath two hundred pounds: fifty for the mass-priests over all my kingdom, fifty for the poor servants of God, fifty for the poor needy'.<sup>59</sup> This is partially a way for Alfred to present himself as a good, Christian king. The wording 'fiftig earmum Godes þeowum, fiftig earmum þearfum', with its parallel syntax, is particularly interesting; it draws a link between the voluntary poor, that is, members of the church, and the lay needy. In this way, Alfred positions himself as the benefactor of both groups, placing himself at the top of both lay and ecclesiastical hierarchies, in an echo of his translation programme which, as his prologue to the *Pastoral Care* suggests, sees a secular ruler redressing an ecclesiastical problem.

A similar motivation is evident in the will of Bishop Theodred of London and Elmham<sup>60</sup>. The will is in two parts: first, it directs a sum of five pounds 'into every bishop's seat' as noted above, and secondly it also stipulates additional sums that each particular bishopric must dole out, often taken from the property he owns at that particular bishopric. As Tollerton notes, 'the public nature of will-making lent immediacy to what, in reality, could be a protracted process of fulfilling the gift',<sup>61</sup> allowing the donor to expect the reciprocal duties from their beneficiaries before actually parting with their property. This donation would certainly have fulfilled this goal, cementing Theodred's

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<sup>58</sup> 'Gif hio ðonne bearn næbbe... þonne foe [Wulfred] to ðæm londe 7 hit forgelde 7 ðæt wiorð gedæle fore hiora gastas...' S 1500 in *Diplomatarium*. p.462.

<sup>59</sup> 'ic forþingie twa hund punda: fiftig mæssepresotum ofer eall min rice, fiftig earmum Godes þeowum, fiftig earmum þearfum.' S 1507 in *Diplomatarium*. p.490

<sup>60</sup> S 1526 (dated to AD 942x951) in *Wills*. pp.2-5.

<sup>61</sup> Tollerton, L. *Wills and Will-Making in Anglo-Saxon England*. (Woodbridge. 2011). p.225.

image as both a generous lord and a fit, generous bishop in each of his bishoprics, as Tollerton also notes. This suggests that posthumous handouts could be a tactic for political gain, for donors throughout the social hierarchy.

However, in Theodred's case, penance may also be a reasonable motive to ascribe, as the *Passio Sancti Edmundi* informs us that Bishop Theodred 'repented for his whole life'<sup>62</sup> for giving a harsh punishment to thieves who attempted to break into St Edmund's tomb.

These three donations, therefore, demonstrate very different motivations, and hint at the huge variety of impulses behind charitable gifts to the poor. This is a contrast to, for example, manumission, which seems to have been driven by a sense of guilt or responsibility on the part of the master, and was therefore a response to a particular problem.<sup>63</sup> A variety of motivations means wide applicability – as we have seen, they could be given by anyone, anywhere. This, in turn, means that the pool of recipients is also unrestricted. On the other hand, this also means that it could be substituted for other forms of donation – in other words, any donor of any means or status could make the choice to give his money as a posthumous distribution, but could equally make the choice to give it to a church. There was nothing to limit the possibility of donation, but equally nothing to necessitate it.

So in the posthumous distributions we see a breadth of geography, donors, and motivations. When we look at chronology, a pattern emerges. The earliest extant will to feature such a gift is Æþelnoþ and Gænbuurg's, in 805x832. The last such will is that of Thurstan, dated to 1043x5. They span, in other words, nearly the full chronological range of the extant wills. Nonetheless, the posthumous bequests do show a concentration in

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<sup>62</sup> 'tempore uitae suae penituit' *Passio Sancti Edmundi*.15, see: Abbo of Fleury. *Passio Sancti Edmundi* in *Three Lives of English Saints*. Winterbottom, M. (ed.) (Toronto. 1972).

<sup>63</sup> For example, a law of Ine's dictates that if a lord commands a slave to work on a Sunday, the slave must be freed, while if the slave does so without his lord's permission, he must be whipped, thereby again employing manumission as a punishment for the lord's misconduct, see: 'Ine' in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*. Liebermann, F. (ed.) (Halle. 1903-6) p.90. In the wills this is taken a step further, with manumission portrayed as a penance for the original act of enslaving. Thus Ælfgifu's will states 'man freoge on ælcum tunæ ælne witæþæownæ mann þæ undær hiræ geþeowuð wæs' S 1484 in *Wills*; 'Free in each town every penally enslaved man who was enslaved under her' Archbishop Ælfric draws on the same sentiment, stating that 'And he wyle þæt man freoge æfter his dæge ælene witefæstene man þe on his timan forgylt wære' S 1488 in *Wills*; 'And it was his will that after this day every penally enslaved man who was condemned in his time be set free'. Æþelstan Æþeling, who is altogether the last to mention manumissions, likewise states: 'þæt is ærest þæt ic geann. Þæt man gefreoge ælcne witefæstene mann. Þe ic on spræce ahte' S 1503 in *Wills*; 'First, I grant that every penally enslaved man whom I acquired in the course of jurisdiction be freed'.

the tenth century, with seven out of the sample of ten wills clustering in this period.<sup>64</sup> This seems to cluster particularly around the reign of King Edgar and, what is most interesting, five were written by testators who can be shown to have known one another, and been part of the same social circle [Figure. 1].

The testators who are most closely socially tied are King Eadred, Æþelflæd, Ælfifu, and Ealdorman Alþheah. King Eadred is the earliest of these, his will being dated to 951-955. This states ‘then he bequeaths for his soul’s deliverance and for the need of his people sixteen hundred pounds so that they may buy off great hunger and the heathen army from themselves if they should need [to do so]’.<sup>65</sup> This was different from the other bequests as it was a response to a particular problem, the invading Vikings, but nonetheless operated as a funeral bequest as it gifted a sum of money that was to be used to stave off hunger, at least in part. The second part of his will is more like the other posthumous distributions, as it dictates ‘then let one take twenty hundred mancusses of gold...let the archbishop receive one part, Bishop Ælfsige receive another, and bishop Oscytel a third and let them share it out throughout the bishoprics.’<sup>66</sup> Although it is not entirely clear whether ‘gedælen geond þa biscopricea’ refers to dealing out the money within the bishoprics, or among bishoprics, the fact that this follows a specific allocation of all of the portions of the money seems to point to the first option.

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<sup>64</sup> Wulfgar, S 1533 (933x939) in *ASCharters*. pp.52-3; Theodred, S 1526 (942x951) in *Wills*. pp.2-5; Ealdorman Æþelwold, S 1504 (946x947) in *Diplomatarium*. pp.499-500; King Eadred, S 1515 (951x955) in *Documents*. pp.34-5, pp.64-5.; Ælfifu, S 1484 (966x975) in *Wills*. pp.20-3; Ealdorman Ælþheah, S 1485 (968x971) in *Wills*. pp.22-5; Æþelflæd, S 1494 (962x991) in *Wills* pp.34-7; and Brihtric and Ælþwið, S 1511 (973x987) in *Wills*. pp.26-9.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Pænne an he his sawla to anliesnesse 7 his ðeodscipe to þearfe sixtyne hund punda to þan ðæt hi mege magan hungor 7 hæþenne here him fram aceapian gif hie beþurfen’ S 1515 in *[Documents]*. p.35

<sup>66</sup> ‘Panne nime man twentig hund mancusa goldes...7 fo se ercebiscop to anum dæle, to oþrum Ælfsige biscop, to þridan Oscytel biscop, 7 gedælen geond þa biscopricea’ S 1515 in *Documents*. p.35.



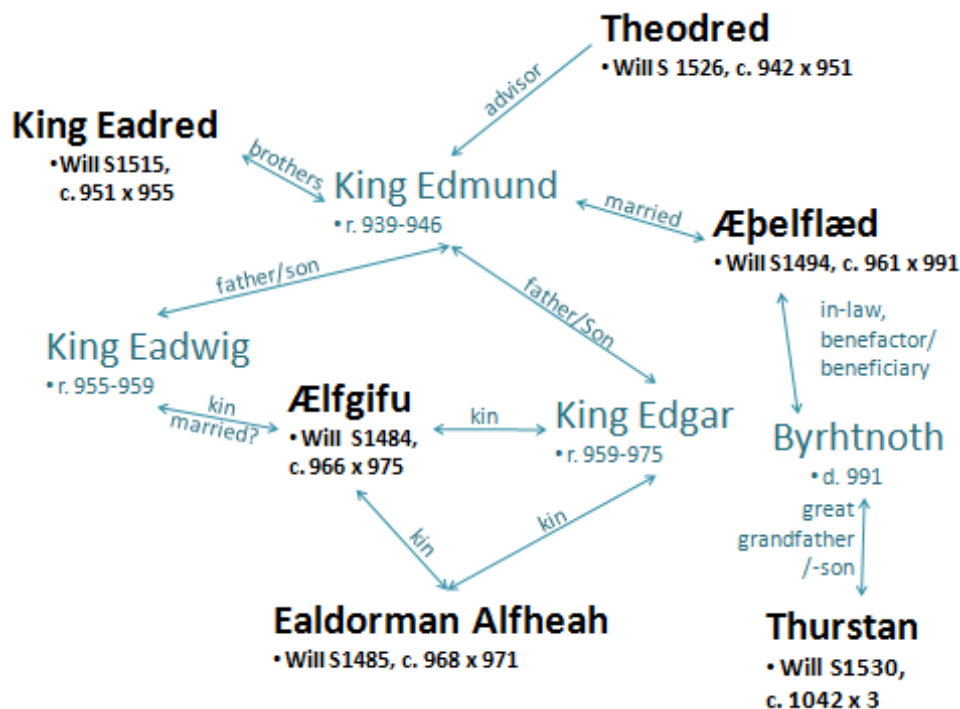


Figure.1 Map of Donor Social Network<sup>67</sup>

Eadred was the brother of King Edmund. The next testator, Æþelflæd, was the daughter of ealdorman Ælfgar, and was also Edmund’s second wife. Her bequest, dated 962x991, reads ‘And I wish...that half the stock which I have be distributed in each village for my soul’.<sup>68</sup>

The next testator is Ælfifu. Herself of royal descent, she was a kinswoman of King Edgar.<sup>69</sup> She may also have been the Ælfifu who Bishop Oda divorced from King Edwig due to consanguinity.<sup>70</sup> And Edwig and Edgar were themselves brothers and Edmund’s sons. They were therefore also Æþelflæd’s step-sons, so Ælfifu is connected to both of the other testators. Her bequest is cited above.

Ælfifu can also be linked to her relative, Ealdorman Ælfheah, S 1485 (968x971). Ælfheah was Ealdorman of Hampshire, and a kinsman of Edgar – and therefore a kinsman of Ælfifu as well, and may in fact have been her brother. His bequest reads ‘and she is to

<sup>67</sup> Figure by Julia Bolotina.

<sup>68</sup> ‘7 ic wille þæt...man dele æl healf þæt ic hæbbæ on ælcum tune for mine sawle’ S 1494 in *Wills*.

<sup>69</sup> He describes her as such in charters S 737 and S 738, as noted in Tollerton. *Wills and Will-Making*. p.97.

<sup>70</sup> Tollerton. *Wills and Will-Making*. p.95.

remember good deeds zealously [with almsgiving] from the property'.<sup>71</sup> It is Whitelock who suggests that this is a funeral handout, noting that the Old English 'god' can be taken to be an accusative plural, and therefore having the meaning of 'good deeds' or 'benefactions'.<sup>72</sup> The possibility that these took the form of funeral handouts is reinforced by the fact that these are to be drawn 'of þam', that is, from the property. This does not, of course, rule out donations to the Church, but the phrasing is reminiscent of funeral handouts.

The final two testators that I would link to this group are less closely intertwined, but still seem to have been a part of it. The first of these is Bishop Theodred, discussed at length above. He was a member of Edmund's court and signed a significant number of the king's charters in third place,<sup>73</sup> suggesting a significant degree of influence at court.

The final testator is Thurstan (S 1531), whose will is dated 1042 or 1043. Thurstan was the great-grandson of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth, the protagonist of *The Battle of Maldon* who died in 991, and who was married to Æþelflæd's sister. His will reads 'and what is left over, the heirs are to distribute it'.<sup>74</sup> Again, that this was a funeral handout is unclear, but is suggested by the instruction to 'distribute', 'delen' – significantly the same word used of distributions in other wills, above – generally, rather than any kind of specific bequests.

So charity by posthumous handout seems to have been especially popular in this particular social network, centred socially around King Edmund, and chronologically around the reign of Edgar. Edgar presided over the Benedictine reform in England, which gained its full momentum at exactly this time, and it is tempting to think that it may have been responsible for creating this cluster. However, a closer look at the donations shows that this is unlikely. While all of the testators in this group left donations to reform centres, Ælfheah's will suggests that the reform may have been irrelevant. The handout, first of all, is to be administered by his wife, rather than any external body or the bishop of Winchester, as in Ælfgifu's case. Moreover, while he did leave money to reform centres such as Old Minster Winchester, Glastonbury, and Bath – significantly,

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<sup>71</sup> 'And heo þanne gæornlicæ of þam god gepænca' S 1485 in *Wills*.

<sup>72</sup> *Wills*. p.125, note on l.31.

<sup>73</sup> The 'Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England' lists one-hundred and seventeen charters witnessed by Theodred, see: 'Theodred 3 (Male)' in Baxter, S., Keynes, S. D., et. al. 'Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England'. <<http://www.pase.ac.uk/jsp/index.jsp>> August 2014.

<sup>74</sup> 'ond þat þe þe þer ouer goð. delen le eruene men for his soule' S 1531 in *Wills*. pp.80-1.

sites which held personal significance to Edgar himself, and therefore also to his social circle – Ælfheah’s bequests also include Ælfhere, Ealdorman of Mercia, who was his brother but also the leader of the anti-monastic reaction after the death of King Edgar. It is possible that this was done in spite of Ælfhere’s political actions, simply as a personal bequest from Ælfheah to his beloved brother. On the other hand, it could indicate that the reform itself was irrelevant to whatever motivations encouraged Ælfheah to make his bequests, particularly placed as it was in such a public document. So the reform does not seem to have been the deciding factor.

What this grouping of wills does demonstrate, however, is that posthumous handouts were in vogue in this particular social network. They were not exclusive to this group, but this does suggest that transmission within one particular social group could be a factor in promoting a particular form of charity. In other words, preferred types of charity spread as a meme. Perhaps in this sense this particular family is an aberration, as their royal status would also encourage others to aspirational imitation of their actions. Nonetheless, this makes it the exception that proves the rule.

However, this leads to the question of whether the fact that donations spread as a meme was a limiting, or intensifying factor. When we consider our present sample of wills, the answer is simple – it seems to have positively determined the choice of testators in the tenth century to give such gifts, so it was, in our sample, intensifying. But what happens when we try to extrapolate outside of the extant wills? Do we assume that the social spread of charity promoted it beyond the South-East, and otherwise in areas where documents are missing? Or that in the seventh to ninth centuries, for which documentary evidence is sparse or non-existent, other charitable memes spread just as easily? Or do we presume that this helped create a unique circumstance, that artificially magnified the importance of donation to the poor in our extant sample?

Support for the poor starts to show up explicitly in legislation in the tenth and eleventh centuries, beginning with Æþelstan’s ‘Ordinance on Charities’, which instructed his reeves to feed the poor, and through legislation of Æþelred and Cnut which subsumed donations to the poor and sick poor within legislation on public penance.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, even in this period this one social network did not entirely have a monopoly on such

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<sup>75</sup> ‘VII Æþelred’ 2.2b; ‘II Cnut’ 68 in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*. Liebermann, F. (ed.) (Halle. 1903-6) pp.364.

bequests, and it is mixed in with, among others, the bequest of a reeve, Brihtric and his wife Ælfswith, S 1511 (973x987). Besides having taken part in a dispute which Edgar adjudicated, there is no discernible connection between them and the family group outlined above.

This suggests that there was, over all, a climate of donation to the poor in the tenth century and beyond. The social network may have made posthumous distributions more popular than, say, gifts to servants, but it did not create a unique interest in helping the poor. It also allows us to see the spread of forms of donation as memes as an intensifying factor in the late Anglo-Saxon period – popularity in that group did not make donations appear out of a vacuum but helped promote a practice that was otherwise extant. This suggests that there were more such gifts outside of the corpus of extant wills in the late period, but does not allow us to extrapolate to the period before the corpus.

So what does this tell us about the applicability of charitable bequests in the wills? Wills, unfortunately, record only the wishes of the testator and not their eventual execution, so we do not know how many of these bequests were fulfilled. That other texts do occasionally represent similar donations, such as Athelstan's donation of thraves, noted above, or Bede's account that Oswald had servants break his silver plate into pieces which were then distributed to the poor along with his meal,<sup>76</sup> suggests that the wills can be taken to be representative of broader practice. There is likewise no extant documentation of anyone receiving such gifts, beyond occasional glimmers in saints' lives which, as noted above, are not historically reliable. The closest one comes is alms land listed in the Domesday Book, however not only was most such land distributed only after the conquest, but it is also unclear whether physical land or fiscal proceeds are meant.<sup>77</sup> Without such corroboration, all that is possible is to extrapolate from the extant information gathered here.

If we include the modifications discussed at the start of this paper, there are 14 wills which contain charitable gifts – that is, a fifth of the corpus. If we include slavery and manumission, that number rises to 31 wills out of 70, or nearly half of the corpus. That

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<sup>76</sup> Bede. *HE*. III.vi.

<sup>77</sup> Most interesting is a cripple named Eadric, listed in the Exchequer Domesday, who holds land in alms from the King. However, it is unclear whether Edward or William is the king implied, cf. Fleming, R. *Domesday Book and the Law: Society and Legal Custom in Early Medieval England*. (Cambridge. 2003) p.26.

charity was common, particularly in documents recorded and kept by the church, is obvious; but this shows that charity specifically intended towards the poor existed alongside such gifts, and held its own among donations to churches and monasteries. People thought about the poor, and, in a fifth of cases, attempted to provide for them. Moreover, these donations could take a variety of forms, meaning that donors had many options of ways to donate to the poor, and could select the option that best suited their circumstances and generosity. Moreover, that such donations are represented in records kept by the Church – that is in collections of only those documents which contain clauses which benefit the Church – suggests that many more such donations may have been made outside of the extant corpus.

Donations had a wide donor pool, with individuals of all genders, statuses, and in all periods giving to the poor, and acting on a wide variety of motivations. This suggests that there were no limitations on who could give or when, or, on the other hand, on who stood the chance of receiving help from such bequests – any of the poor, including the sick poor, could entertain the hope of receiving such help, and not only those tied to a particular kind of lord, or in particular circumstances. Moreover, as wills such as those of Theodred or Ælfgifu, which distribute wealth in all villages or bishoprics subordinated to them show, such gifts could have a wide impact, with one charitable act potentially benefiting a large number of the poor.

As well, the even spread of donors through social rank and geographically throughout the South-East suggests that it is unlikely that this trend only existed there, and it is possible to extrapolate that the extant sample of wills is representative of the state of charity throughout the country. As noted earlier, whether this was also true before the ninth century is unclear. Certainly handouts to the poor are attested in hagiography, as in Bede's account of Oswald distributing a silver plate, noted above. However, there is no other, and certainly no non-hagiographical evidence that could illuminate the extent of private, secular charity before the ninth century.

Having said that, the breadth of donors, in the South-East or elsewhere, and motivations also meant that nothing necessitated such gifts; while anyone in possession of property *might* choose to give such a gift, they also had a large arsenal of other means of expressing their charitable impulses. That forms of donation spread as a meme may have

tipped that choice towards handouts to the poor in the late Anglo-Saxon period, but it would not have made donations to the Church any less enticing.

Moreover, fourteen donations over three hundred years is hardly a large number. While most of the poor were 'eligible' to receive gifts, the number whose hopes were realised must have been, in the grand scheme of things, still quite small. Private donation to the poor existed and was common enough that it was part of the landscape of support in Anglo-Saxon England, but it was not a reliable or comprehensive form of social support.

And this brings us back to hospitals and the sick poor. That the majority of these donations involved gifts of liquid wealth or food would certainly have helped with some of the financial burdens that come with ill health. However, the scarcity of such donations in absolute terms also suggests that it was not a reliable 'fallback resource' for the sick. As noted earlier, donations were only a piece of the puzzle of pre-hospital social support for the sick in Anglo-Saxon England, but if so, it was a small one, and could not have offered nearly the same scale of support as the network of one hundred and thirty hospitals that would be built by the Anglo-Normans within one hundred years of the conquest.<sup>78</sup>

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**\* Erratum:**

Please note a correction (as of 21<sup>st</sup> April 2015) has been made to p.7 following initial publication. What had read: 'This adds financial strain. First of all, physicians charged fees, which are mentioned in only one source: the *Poenitentiale Pseudo-Ecgberti*, stipulates that one who injures another in the groin or face must do his work for him and 'give the physician's fee to the physician'.' now reads: 'This adds financial strain. First of all, physicians charged fees. These are mentioned clearly in the so-called *Confessionale Pseudo-Ecgberti* or *Scriftboc*, which stipulates that one who injures another in the groin or face must do his work for him and 'give the physician's fee to the physician'.' The accompanying footnote, n.18, has likewise been corrected.

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<sup>78</sup> Kealey, E. J. *Medieval Medicus: A Social History of Anglo-Norman Medicine*. (Baltimore. 1981) p.2.

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