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The cartulary and charters of the priory of Saints Peter and Paul, Ipswich, part I the Cartulary

edited by David Allen, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press for the Suffolk Records Society, 2018, xix + 292 pp., £60 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-78327-354-6 (Suffolk Records Society, Suffolk Charters)

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chapters present out-of-date or occasionally inaccurate information where the authors appear to have had relatively less exposure to the concepts they present. Some chapters are exceptionally well referenced and provide valuable lists of further reading material, yet others cite very few resources and fail to acknowledge the wider activities within the digital preservation community that could have informed their thinking. Statements like “information and data preservation have historically been, and will continue to be, the domains of libraries and museums’ seemingly overlook the long tradition of archival involvement in the domain, and the book contains relatively little discussion of sustainability — which otherwise might have been expected to be the theme of the book and the framework to bring all of the chapters together.

There is some valuable guidance in this book, and helpful lessons shared. The collaboration section, for example, contains useful insights on successes and challenges of collaborative working and is widely relevant. The content-type case studies provide some interesting ‘deep dives’ into the challenges of working with specific content types, and the institutional case studies present experiences from which others can learn. At times however, the book only scratches the surface of the topics explored and readers are advised to check the references for insight into the currency of the information presented.

This is not a reference or text book, nor a manual, but nor does it claim to be. It is more a summary of individual experiences and ideas, told from the perspective of practitioners mainly (but not exclusively) within a US or university library setting. It is thus most likely to be of interest to those seeking case studies and perspectives on digital preservation, particularly from a university library perspective.

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The cartulary of the Augustinian priory of Ipswich, of which the present volume is an edition, was purchased by Ipswich Borough Council (with the Victoria & Albert Museum’s support) from the Lexington Public Library (Kentucky) in 1970 and deposited with the Suffolk Record Office at Ipswich, where it now has the catalogue reference HD 226/1. The manuscript had been presented to the Library by John Bebb, apparently in 1806, having been brought from England (it has been suggested) by an English royalist; for Lexington was populated by Virginians from a part of that state which was much settled by English royalists after 1649. The cartulary was conserved and re-bound in 1972, at which time its quires were reorganised in accordance with suggestions made in 1953 by GRC Davis, following his examination of a photographic copy that had been acquired by the record office in 1944.

The priory itself was suppressed at the behest of Cardinal Wolsey in 1528 to provide an endowment for his own new college in Ipswich and its buildings were earmarked as the site of the college. The priory’s medieval cartulary was largely completed by the 1270s, though it does

include a number of additions of a later date, amongst which are several extents of the priory's properties dating from later in the thirteenth century. The contents of the manuscript relate to rural properties in the vicinity of Ipswich, the area of Suffolk to which the priory's possessions were confined; the cartulary contains surprisingly little material for the town of Ipswich itself, where the priory owned a variety of burgage tenements. This meticulous edition by David Allen, who was for many years an archivist at Suffolk Record Office, has much benefitted from his scholarly expertise and intimate knowledge of the relevant sources. His introduction provides a thorough discussion of the priory's foundation (before 1133) and the character of its property acquisition; apparently no new properties were acquired after 1347, with the exception of one substantial purchase in 1392. Benefactions seem to have fallen off markedly from the late thirteenth century; Allen gives an informative and carefully researched account of the priory's principal benefactors (almost invariably members of local families of modest landowning status). Few leases of property have come to light, but these show that leasing was under way by the early or mid-thirteenth century. Allen's introduction has a brief but useful discussion of the priory's buildings, income and brethren. There was some building work undertaken in the early fourteenth century (including a Lady Chapel) and a west tower and south porch were constructed in the fifteenth century. It appears likely that most of the priors and likewise the canons originated from the environs of Ipswich.

While two hundred and thirty-five original charters of the priory have been traced, as part of David Allen's investigatory work in connection with the priory, only thirty-six of these were copied into the cartulary, thereby making the manuscript a significant historical source for Suffolk during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in its own right. The charters in the cartulary have been fully transcribed as well as calendared in the present volume; and the editor has made painstaking efforts to ascertain the likely dates of the undated items, which predominate. The surviving original charters of the priory (mainly preserved amongst the classes of 'Ancient Deeds' held by The National Archives) will be the subject of a companion volume, the publication of which is expected during the course of 2019. Allen's assiduous study of the original charters has, of course, been of the greatest value in the compilation of his introductory and editorial matter for the present volume, which does in fact provide a useful introduction to the charters as well as to the cartulary. The original charters are frequently referred to in Allen's introduction by the serial numbers allocated to them in the forthcoming volume, and it is something of a frustration for a user of this volume that one cannot turn immediately to the companion volume in order to consult those as well. The present volume lacks an index, but an index to the two volumes is to appear in the anticipated volume. Again, this is not especially helpful for the reader. Although there is much to be said for treating such closely related archival material in two volumes in this way, it would have been rather more helpful had the two volumes been published simultaneously. A little disappointing is the fact that the two (black and white) illustrations of pages from the manuscript printed in this volume are too small and too indistinct to enable a reader to perceive from them very much about the palaeographical and diplomatic character of the cartulary. But, notwithstanding these few niggles, there is no mistaking the fact that David Allen has done a splendid job in this volume, which forms a distinguished addition to the Suffolk Record Society's admirable published series of Suffolk charters.

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