

The Charters of King William II (1087–1100)

The purpose of the grant awarded in 2002–3 under the Larger Research Grants scheme was to prepare a draft edition of the charters of William II; it was a stated intention to include for each beneficiary an introductory essay on how the charters from this reign fit into their local context. This has been accomplished. The simple text of the charters amounts to 110 pages. With annotation and beneficiary headnotes, the draft now runs to some 560 pages, not including general introduction or indices; some of the beneficiary headnotes are in need of further work, which will be best done in conjunction with work on the charters of Henry I.

The edition of William II's charters was conceived as a development project towards a more ambitious programme of work on the charters from the reign of Henry I (1100–1135) (more than eight times more numerous), which was to be the subject of an application to the AHRB. The bid was submitted in November 2002 and was successful, so that work has now begun to edit the charters of Henry I in the same format. The AHRB project will also include various auxiliary works, such as a detailed chronological framework of the reign, necessary for working out the dates of charters but useful for many purposes, and a prosopographical index to the individuals named in the charters, including witness lists, which will again open up one complex aspect of the charters' information to many more uses. Work proceeds apace on this.

The expectation is that the publication of William II's charters will be carried forward alongside Henry I's, which will take the same essential format, with introductory essays on the beneficiaries. This scheme has important advantages over that of merely publishing William II's charters before Henry I's have been started. It will allow William II's charters to be understood in the context of the complete run of Anglo-Norman diplomatic, rather than simply that of the one reign alone. It will lead to a fuller understanding of the individual beneficiary archives over time, give a greater sense of their evolving content, and permit the demonstration of the interconnectedness of texts over time. Moreover, work on Henry I's charters should refine understanding of the diplomatic of all Anglo-Norman charters, and perhaps also allow for technical improvement of the innovative format for presentation that is used.

Work on the charters of William II has already brought substantial results. More documents have been discovered, some of considerable interest. The dating of documents has been much refined in the light of a greater appreciation of the principles on which the royal scribes composed their documents. Understanding of the use of documents, especially writs and writ-charters, has been deepened through a more precise awareness of the identities and roles of local officers built up from the *acta* and other sources. Knowledge of the king's itinerary has been much improved from an ability to provide more accurate and precise dates for the documents, and the chronology of bishops and earls has been refined on the same basis.

The work on William II has successfully tested the possibilities for tackling Henry I's charters in the same way. The grant that made this possible has opened up the way to a very substantial advance in the accessibility and comprehension of the largest and most diverse body of historical evidence for the two reigns.