

Transcription Exercise

John Cooper-Hammond

Student No: 2022129

Chosen topic: Cotton MS Nero D VII, British Library



Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment coversheet & feedback form

THIS SHEET MUST BE THE FIRST PAGE OF THE ASSIGNMENT YOU ARE SUBMITTING (DO NOT SEND AS A SEPARATE FILE)

For completion by the student:

Student Name: John Cooper-Hammond

Module code: HPHI7016

Student ID number:

Educational
support needs:

Module title: Past Peoples, Present Societies:
Research Methods & Skills

2022129

No

Module tutor:
Alex Scott

Assignment due date: 14th November 2021

If your module has multiple submissions please indicate which piece of work this is.

1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th ☒ 6th ☐ **Assessment 5: Transcription Exercise**

I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism.

Signed ...John Cooper-Hammond...

Email submission: if you are submitting this form via email, please tick this box ☐ (as a substitute for your signature) to confirm that you agree to the above declaration.

Assignment Mark

1st Marker's Provisional mark

2nd Marker's/Moderator's provisional mark

External Examiner's mark (if relevant)

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Final Mark	
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the Final Examination Board.	
For completion by Marker 1 : Comments:	
Marker's signature:	Date:
For completion by Marker 2/Moderator: Comments:	
Marker's Signature:	Date:
External Examiner's comments (if relevant)	
External Examiner's Signature:	Date:

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The document chosen is lodged in the British Library, where it is identified as Cotton MS Nero D VII, and as the *St Albans Benefactors Book*, also known as the *Golden Book of St Albans up to f82v*. This manuscript is a register of the benefactors of the abbey, who were admitted to the fraternity of the abbey for their generosity, with details of their gifts, and also includes lists of members of the abbey's community. The work was commissioned by Abbot Thomas de La Mare in 1380, as the book explains:

And so Thomas, our venerable father and master, by the grace of God abbot of this monastery, with the agreement of our whole chapter decided that the spiritual blessings of this house should be shared with all those, whether groups or individuals, living or dead, who as a result of a vow had bequeathed to us and our church something from these goods given to them by God... To these same people should be granted full fraternity in the monastery so that they might share fully with us in masses, ... and all other benefits which take place in this monastery or in our daughter churches...

When the book was made, following the initial compilation, space was left for additions and these were made from the end of the 14th century to the end of the 15th century in a similar format, further entries and additions were made into 16th century.¹ In 1539, at the dissolution of the abbey, the books from the library were deemed valuable and many were saved, this codex passed into the hands of Francis Bacon, Viscount St Alban and was given by him to Sir Bruce Cotton in 1623, it passed down the Cotton family as part of its collection until bequeathed to the British Museum in 1753.

The codex was produced during the 1380s in St Albans Abbey through the work of three men. The text itself states that the original listing was compiled by Thomas Walsingham, a renowned historian and chronicler, and the abbey's precentor, from records held by the abbey. It also states that the book was written, up to f82v, by William de Wyllum, a monk in the abbey. The illustrations, up to f108r, were done by a professional, lay, artist named as Alan Strayler, who includes his own portrait, typically similar to the miniatures used for many of the donors, who were often depicted holding their benefactions or at least the document giving land, rights, or privileges.

¹ A partial copy and extensions of the entries was made and is still extant as MS 7 in the Parker Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

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Strayler waived the cost of his pigments in order to be amongst the benefactors and to be admitted to the fraternity as a donor of his time and materials. The use of Strayler, and the range of colours for the illustrations can be seen as an indication of the monastery's investment in the manuscript. From the very beginning this was seen as a high-status document, it is professionally written and illustrated, there appear to be no contemporary marginalia or comments. From viewing the manuscript it would seem that most, if not all, the marginal comments are post monastic. They form handwritten notes in a range of different scripts along with the red 'Museum Britannicum' stamp. The book was intended to be kept on the high altar, probably as a commemoration of donors both living and dead, and possibly its function 'pour encourage les autres' to also make donations. The fact it sat on the high altar or on the shrine of St Alban shows its importance, but also meant it was a showpiece, this meant it was not in everyday use and goes a long way to explain its state of preservation.

The manuscript is written on parchment, which is 365x230 mm in size, the written size being 260x160 mm. The script is in a good book hand and is not restricted on crabbed in form, being of a *textualis/textura* aspect. Feint ruled lines, are visible and it is written using black ink, however the text does contain some penwork initials in red and blue, and occasionally green ink. Coloured penwork is also used to provide line fillers and spacers in the text. The work was carried out in St Albans Abbey. The text contains a limited number of brevisgraphs and there are marks, like an upwardly sloping hyphen, to indicate a line break within a word, in most cases. Each section, detailing a benefactor of the abbey is accompanied by a picture of the patron, and the initial letters of are illuminated and coloured. Both the enhanced capital letters and the pictures use a wide palette of colours and are detailed with decoration.² The book is bound in a British Museum binding with brown leather covers tooled in gold, it consists of

² The colours used are red, blue, green, cream, brown, white, black, and grey, with a generous use of gold leaf.

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three unfoliated papers, two parchment folio fly leaves and 157 folios, with two end papers.³

The text has been described as a *who's who* of medieval England, however it provides valuable source for the history of St Albans Abbey and an orderly view of medieval society a history of 'colourful characters, precious gifts and shared stories that were the fabric of the abbey's community' ...⁴

Not only are contemporary donors recorded, but the entries also stretch back to the abbey's beginnings, to its foundation in 793 by King Offa of Mercia, and it is this entry that has been selected for transcription. In making the transcription the guidelines, to be found on the National Archives website⁵ were followed. Each line of text was allotted a number, counting from the head of the page chosen. The transcription was laid out in a way identical to the text, including using the colours used by the original scribe. Each word was written identically to the original text with the spelling as given in the manuscript. Contraction, suspensions and brevirgraphs are written in full, as far as was possible to ascertain the meanings, where a letter or a contraction/suspension was not known a question mark is inserted. These extras are all contained in square brackets.

As well as the illustrations provided the digitised text is available on line from the British Library at:

https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_nero_d_vii_fs001r

Folios 3v and 4r

f3v



Half-page picture of King Offa as founder of Saint Alban's Abbey, holding a representation of his benefaction, the abbey itself

³ Basic facts drawn from the British Library catalogue entry for this manuscript

⁴ Michael Graham, 2021, *St Albans Library blog on The Book of Benefactors*

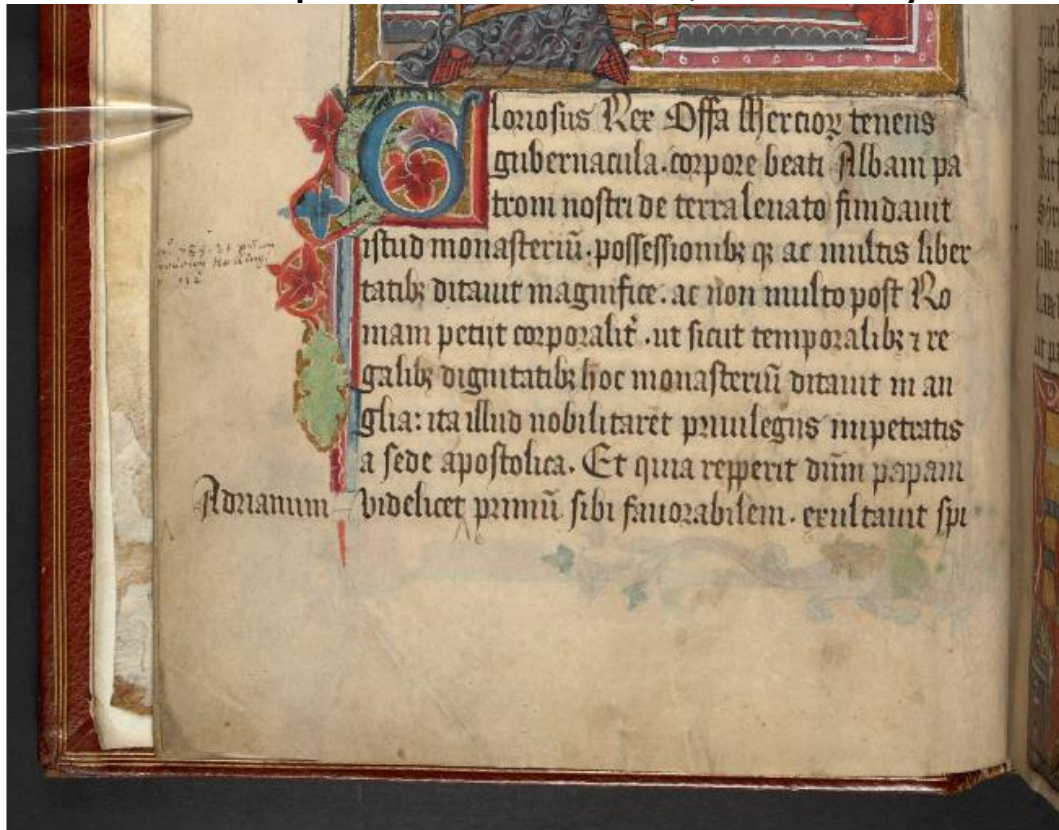
⁵ National Archives Transcription at: <https://www.archives.gov/paleography/default.htm>

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1. **G**loriosus Rex Offa Mercio[rum] tenens
2. gubernacula. corpore beati Albam pa
3. tro[un]m nostri de terra lenato fundam[en]tum
4. istud manasteriu[m]. possessionib[us] q[ue] ac multis liber-
5. tatib[us] ditavit magnifice. ac iton multo post Ro-
6. mam pet[u]nt corporalit[um]. ut sicut temporalib[us] [and] re-
7. galib[us] dignitatib[us] hoc monasteriu[s] ditavit in an-
8. nglia: ita illud nobilitaret primlegn[i]s impetratus
9. a fede apostolica. Et quia repperit d[u]m papam
10. *in the right margin* Romanum
videlicet primu[s] sibi favorabilem. exultavit spi-

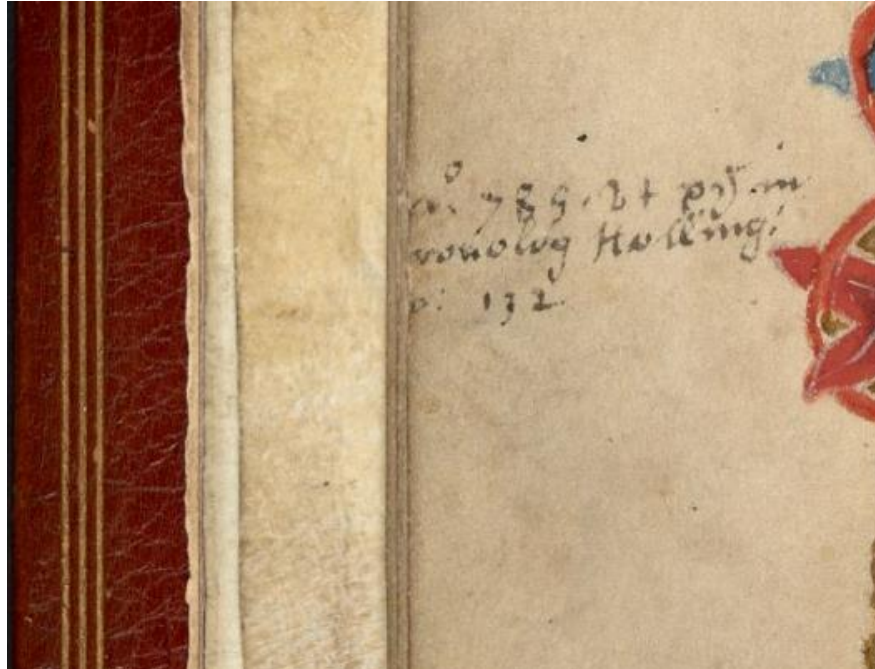
The first Capital, G, is illuminated with a foliate design that flows down into the margin to the bottom of the text. In the top margin, above the illustration, and in the bottom margin another foliate design that has bled through from the preceding page. There is a note in the left margin alongside line 1, written in a different hand in a flowing but feint script. This consists of 3 lines a text written very small – so much so that even under high digital magnification it is not generally legible. Line 1 has the numbers 7,8,9. 2 + but the words before and after these are not legible. Lie 2 may contain a name starting with H, possibly reading H[?]lling and line 3 appears to read p: 132.

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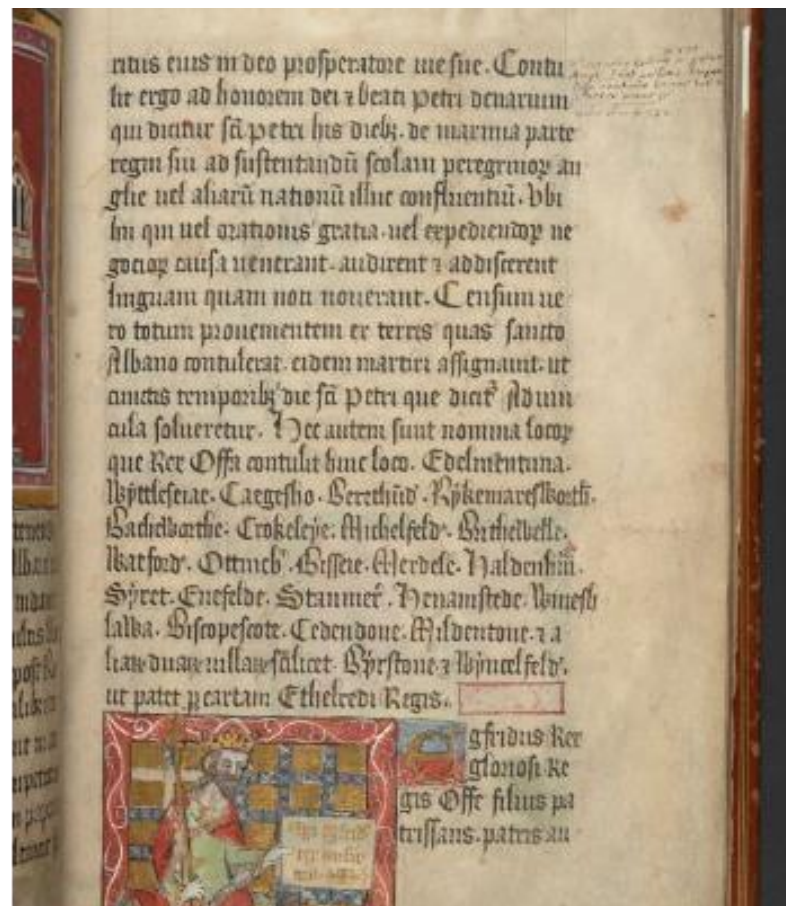
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End of folio page

Start of f4r



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Transcription of text

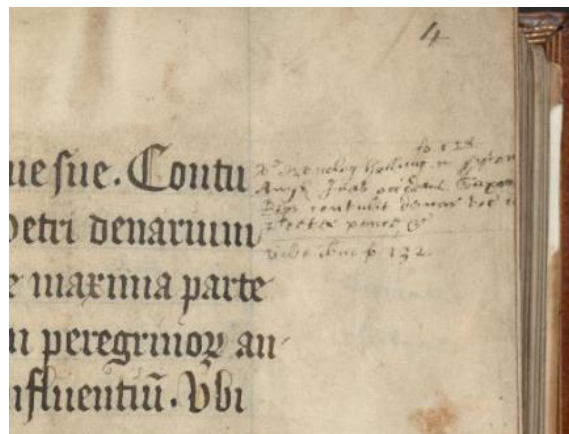
1. ritus eius in deo prosperatore inesue. Contu
2. fit ergo ad honorem dei [et] beati Petri denarium
3. qui dicitur sa[nctus] petri his dieb[us]. de maxima parte
4. regni sui ad sustentandu[s] scolam perigrino[rum] an –
5. glie uel aliaru[m] nationu[m] illuc confluentiu[s]. Ubi
6. l[ice]n[t]i[a] qui uel nationis gratia. uel expediento[rum] ne-
7. gocio[rum] causa venerant. audirent [et] addiscerent
8. linguam quam non noverant. Censum ve-
9. ro totum provenientem ex terris quas sancto
10. Albano contulerat. eidem martiri assignauit. ut
11. cunitis temporib[us] die sa[nctus] Petri que dicit[er] Advin-
12. cula solveretur. Hec autem sunt nomina loco[rum]
13. Que Rex Offa contulit hinc loco. Edelmentuna.

Lines 14 – 20 – a list of names, not transcribed.

The short lines 21 – 24 alongside a picture of King Egfridus read:

21. Egfridus Rex
22. gloriosi Re-
23. gis Offe filius pa-
24. trissans. Patris au- (f4v gens ...)

At the top of the page in the right-hand corner is the number 4



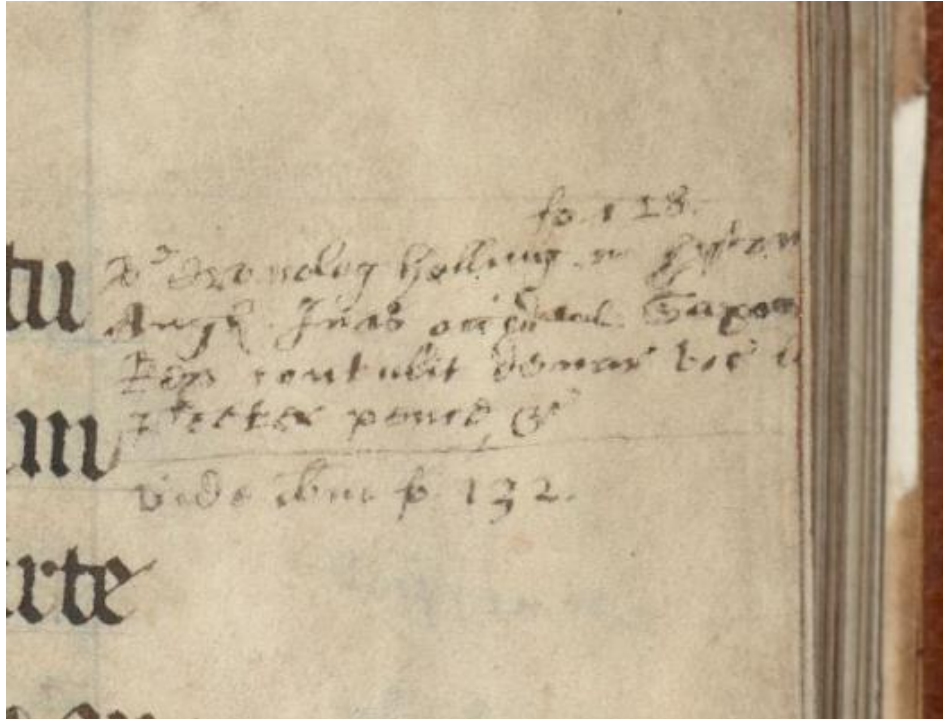
There is a note in the right margin alongside lines 1 and 2 written in a third, different, hand in a flowing but feint script, not all the letters have sufficient ink colour. This consists of 6 lines a text written very small – so much so that even under high digital magnification it is not generally legible. However the first line appears to be *fo [?] r18* and the sixth line appears to be *vide ibid p 132*.

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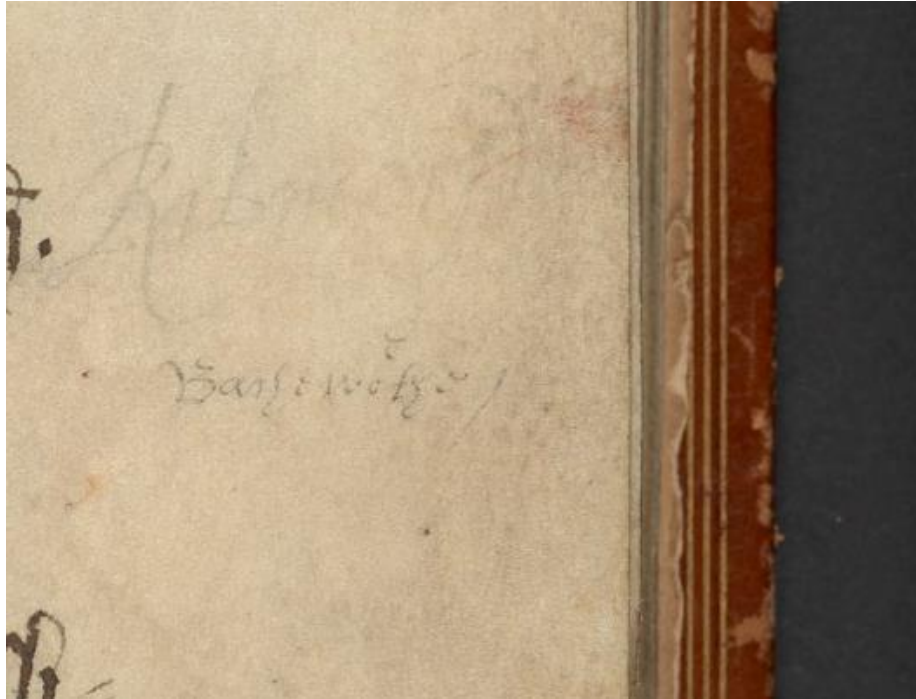
There is a white blemish in the parchment at the bottom of the page and both margins contain small rust-coloured marks. In the right margin, alongside line 14 there is a marginal note, a fourth hand, with a most ornate, flowing style, the whole word is very feint, but the first 3 letters appear to be Rib[???..]. Below this adjacent to line 15 is yet another, fifth, hand, in a more archaic style, is a note that appears to read Bar[l]ewo[r]t[??]

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The transcription turned out to be an interesting, but challenging task. According to the PORT guidelines, the 'frequency and number of abbreviations found is often inversely proportional to the degree of formality of a given manuscript or document'.⁶ The limited number brevigraphs also indicate the investment made in this manuscript by the abbey. Whilst generally legible the book hand used, in all appearances was very even, it was a problem to identify individual minims and hence the letters they made. The horizontal strokes on letters were easily confused with the linking strokes between letters these both being much finer than the heavy downstrokes. Having some knowledge of Latin was not always useful and was a hinderance in some instances, due to the medieval usage and spelling of Latin being at variance with the learnt form, which led to some wrong assumptions being made⁷. Another problem was the use of some macrons and brevigraphs in ways that were not shown in the texts and websites used to support this exercise. Most of the words transcribed appeared to make some sort of sense, however there were some uncertainties. These may well have been a result of the idiosyncratic writing by the original scribe; or of forms not come across elsewhere; or of usages that have now been lost. Each of these possibilities are equally likely/unlikely to be the case, or even something completely different. Nevertheless, it is believed that the greater part of the text on these two pages has been transcribed in a reasonable way.

Word count 1,950

⁶ PORT The University of London School of Advanced Study postgraduate online research training website, *Transcription*

⁷ I am of an age to have been in school when Latin was a pre-requisite for university entrance.

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References

Backhouse, Janet, 1997, *The Illuminated Page: Ten Centuries of Manuscript Painting*, London: The British Library

Brown, Michelle P. with Teviotdale, Elizabeth C. & Turner, Nancy K. (revisers), *Understanding Illuminated Manuscripts: A Guide to Technical Terms* = - revised edition, Los Angeles: The Paul Getty Museum

Clark, James G., 2021, *Chroniclers of History: The Medieval Monks Of St Albans and their Books*, St Albans, Hertfordshire: St Albans Museum and Gallery. A catalogue to accompany the exhibition *Chroniclers of History* at the St Albans Museum 30 July – 31 October 2021

Graham, Michael, 2021, *The Book of Benefactors of the Monastery of St Albans*, St Albans Abbey blog 19th July 2021 at:

<https://www.stalbanscathedral.org/blog/the-book-of-benefactors-of-the-monastery-of-st-albans>

Latham, R.E., 1965, *Revised Medieval Latin Wordlist from British and Irish sources*, London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy

Marshall, Hilary, 2021, *Palaeography for Family and Local Historians*, Andover, Hampshire: Phillimore

The following websites were accessed and found to be useful in fulfilling this assignment:

Jackson, Eleanor, 2020, *British Library Medieval Manuscripts Blog: The St Albans Benefactors' Book: precious gifts and colourful characters*, posted 27th May 2020 at: <https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2020/05/the-st-albans-benefactors-book.html>

Consortium of European Research libraries: transcribing medieval manuscripts and archival material accessed at:

https://www.cerl.org/resources/links_to_other_resources/tools_describing_mss_and_archival_materials

Seale, Yvonne, A beginner's guide to digital palaeography of medieval manuscripts at: <https://yvonneseale.org/blog/2016/03/26/dh-palaeography>

University of Hull Library, Guides – Archival Skills: Palaeography at:

<https://libguides.hull.ac.uk/archival-skills/palaeography>

Harvard's Geoffrey Chaucer Website: How to read medieval handwriting (Palaeography) at: <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/how-to-read-medieval-handwriting-palaeography>

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PORT The University of London School of Advanced Study postgraduate online research training website, *Transcription* at: <https://port.sas.ac.uk>

University of Nottingham manuscripts and special collections; letter forms and abbreviations at: https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscripts_and_specialcollections/researchguidance/medievaldocuments/letterformsandabbreviations.aspx

Universitäts und Stadtbibliothek Köln website for an on-line copy of - Cappelli, Adriano, 1928, *Lexicon Abbreviatorum*, Leipzig: JJ Weber at: www.ub.uni-koeln.de/cdm/pageflip/collection/mono20/id/8533/type/compoundobject/show/7918/cpdtype/monograph/pftype/image#page/1/mode/2up