

HPHI7016

Past Peoples, Present Societies:

Research Methods and Skills

Assignment 3

Dating Medieval Documents

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Assignment 3 - Dating Medieval Documents

For each of the questions below, the date will be established by breaking the problem down into several queries, each of which should narrow down the possibilities until the exact or estimated date can be calculated.

Question (a)

The 8th year of King Richard II can be calculated from the date of Richard's accession to the throne, which was 22 June 1377. The 8th regnal year was therefore 22 June 1384 to 21 June 1385.¹

The Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was a major religious festival and was celebrated on 15 August every year. Cheney's tables of the Julian calendar can be used find the date of Easter Sunday, which was 10 April 1384, and that 15 August 1384 fell on a Monday.²

The Thursday after the Assumption was, therefore, 18 August 1384 which is the date in the Julian calendar that the abbot of Byland was accused in the wapentake court.

¹ C. R. Cheney and Michael Jones, *A Handbook of Dates for Students of English History*, new edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p 35.

² Ibid. pp. 226-230 and 194-195.

Question (b)

Firstly, the dates that Bishop Anian of St Asaph was in office need to be established. There were two bishops with the name Anian in St Asaph in the mid thirteenth century. It is assumed that the question refers to Bishop Anian I as he was more immediately preceded by Bishops Reiner, Abraham and Hugh. The table below shows the sequence of Bishops of St Asaph from Reiner to Anian II.³

Bishop	Date consecrated	Date of death
Reiner	10 August 1186	1224
Abraham	29 June 1225	before 4 February 1237
Hugh	17 June 1235	1240, after September
Hywel ab Ednyfed	1240-42	1247
Anian I (Einion)	November 1249	before 29 September 1266
John II	After 17 April 1267	1267 or 1268
Anian II	21 October 1268	5 February 1293

If, for the reasons stated above, it is assumed that the document refers to Anian I, the first year of his pontificate would be November 1249 to October 1250.

The feast of St Mary Magdalene falls on 22 July, therefore the day after the feast in the first year of Anian's pontificate would be 23 July 1250.⁴

On the other hand, if the document is referring to Anian II, the date he confirmed the charters would be 23 July 1269.

³ Data from E.B. Fryde, D.E. Greenway, S. Porter, and I. Roy (eds.), *Handbook of British Chronology*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; repr. 1996), p. 295.

⁴ Cheney and Jones, *Dates for Students*, p. 78.

Question (c)

To establish which King Edward the document is referring to, it is first necessary to date the episcopate of John de Ketene. Previously a Benedictine monk, John de Ketene was Archbishop of Ely from 1310 to 1316.⁵ This period is within the reign of Edward II, who was on the throne from 8 July 1307 until 20 January 1327. Edward's fourth regnal year was 8 July 1310 to 7 July 1311 which coincides with the first episcopal year of John de Ketene.⁶

As the regnal year runs from 8 July, the Ash Wednesday referred to will be in 1311. In 1311 Easter fell on 11 April. Working back from Easter Sunday, Ash Wednesday would be 24 February and, therefore, the Thursday following that day would be 25 February. However, from the twelfth century until 1752 the 25 March, which marks the Feast of the Assumption, was considered to be the start of the new year and dates from 1 January to 24 March were treated as part of the year that started on the previous 25 March.⁷

Therefore, the Downham court in question was held on 25 February 1310, using the medieval convention, but under a modern dating system this would be considered to be 25 February 1311.

⁵ Institute of Historical Research, University of London, *British History Online* <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/fasti-ecclesiae/1300-1541/vol4/pp13-16>> [accessed 28 November 2025].

⁶ Cheney and Jones, *Dates for Students*, p 34.

⁷ Cheney and Jones, p. 13 and p. 196.

Question (d)

The style 'Henry king of the English' (Henricus Rex Anglorum) was frequently used by Henry I in his writs and charters.⁸ Henry ruled from 5 August 1100 to 1 December 1135 so this sets out the maximum period during which the charter must have been issued.⁹

It is interesting that the Bishop of Lincoln is unnamed. There were two holders of this office during Henry's reign. Robert Bloet was in office when Henry acceded to the throne and died on 10 January 1123. He was succeeded by Alexander who was nominated in April 1123 and consecrated on 22 July. He was in office for the rest of Henry's reign, dying in 1148.¹⁰ It could be that the charter was issued in the interregnum between the two bishops which would date it to somewhere between January and July 1123 or in the period between Alexander's nomination and his consecration.

Earl David was the title used by King David I of Scotland before he took the Scottish throne on or around 25 April 1124.¹¹ This then indicates the latest date by which the charter could have been issued.

The charter concerns the disposal of the lands and assets of Geoffrey Ridel and the agreement that his daughter should marry Richard Basset. Geoffrey Ridel died in the White Ship disaster on 25 November 1120.¹² This is, therefore, the earliest date for the issue of the charter. No date could be found for the marriage of Richard Bassett and Matilda Ridel.

Many witnesses to the charter are listed, and their dates of birth, death and time in office can be useful in narrowing down the window in which the charter could have

⁸ Many of these charters are reproduced in Latin in H.W.C. Davis, R.J. Whitwell, and C. Johnson (eds), *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, Vol. II: *Regesta Henrici Primi*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), pp. 305-389.

⁹ Cheney and Jones, *Dates for Students*, p. 32.

¹⁰ Fryde and others, *Handbook of British Chronology*, p. 255.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 56.

¹² Oxford University Press, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
<<https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-23617?rskey=6pXnup&result=3>> [accessed 28 November 2025].

been issued. Geoffrey de Clinton was appointed chancellor in c 1120, but no exact date could be found which would be helpful in establishing the date of the charter.¹³

Ranulf was appointed Earl of Chester in early January 1121 after his cousin Richard also died in the White Ship Disaster. Ranulf died in 1129, followed a few years later by his brother William.¹⁴ This shifts the earliest possible date of the charter forward but does not impact the latest date. Humphrey de Bohun died c 1123, but no exact date can be found to assist with dating the charter.¹⁵ No specific dates for the other witnesses can be found which would affect the estimated date of issue.

Therefore, the widest period in which the charter was issued is between early January 1121 when Ranulf was appointed Earl of Chester and the death of Humphrey de Bohun in 1123. During this time, Henry I is known to have been at Woodstock between 10 January 1123 and 15 April 1123 after which he travelled to Winchester.¹⁶ Records of the Court's itinerary could be incomplete and so it is possible that Henry may have visited Woodstock on other occasions between 1121 and 1123.

Given the evidence set out above, it is not possible to date the issue of the original charter definitively, but it is possible to estimate that it was issued between 10 January and 15 April 1123 during Henry I's documented visit to Woodstock as none of the other evidence contradicts this.

Other copies of the charter exist with similar wording but a different list of witnesses. Scholars consider the provisions of the charter to be genuine, but it is likely that copies were made which may have introduced errors or embellishments.¹⁷ The charter in question is likely to be one of these later copies. It is not possible to estimate when this copy was made without a physical examination of the document,

¹³ David Grough, 'Geoffrey de Clinton and Roger, Earl of Warwick: New Men and Magnates in the Reign of Henry I', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 55 (1982), 113–124.

¹⁴ Oxford University Press, *ODNB*

<<https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-23127?rskey=wX6lqk&result=1>> [accessed 29 November 2025].

¹⁵ Oxford University Press, *ONDB*

<<https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2774#odnb-9780198614128-e-2774-headword-2>> [accessed 29 November 2029].

¹⁶ Fryde and others, *Handbook of British Chronology*, p. xxix.

¹⁷ Davis and others, *RRAN*, p. 184.

including an analysis of the style of handwriting, type of ink and pens used, and any additional marks made by scribes or later users of the charter.

Bibliography

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