NICHOLAS BROOKS

Nicholas Peter Brooks
1941–2014

NICHOLAS PETER BROOKS WAS born in Virginia Water, Surrey, on 14 January 1941. His father, W. D. W. Brooks, CBE, served during the Second World War as a naval doctor, based in Chatham, Kent, and later became a consultant physician at St Mary's Hospital, Paddington. Nicholas's mother Phyllis Juler, was a physician's daughter, an accomplished figure-skater and also a talented cellist. Nicholas, the third of their four children, recalled his mother's piano-playing: 'music was always part of our home'. Though born in Surrey, Nicholas considered himself 'a man of Kent', because during his childhood his family spent summer holidays in a small cottage near Elham, a few miles south of Canterbury.

After prep school, Nicholas attended Winchester College from 1954 to 1958. There his housemaster was Harold Elliot Walker, an inspirational historian and amateur archaeologist. Harold, a bachelor, often spent summer holidays with the Brooks family. Harold's advice to his pupils was: 'Take up your hobby!' Nicholas duly went up to Magdalen College Oxford in 1959 already a keen and accomplished historian. He won a prestigious Oxford History Prize in 1960 for his dissertation, 'The Normans in Sicily'. But by the time he graduated, in 1962, his heart was in Anglo-Saxon England, and specifically Kent and Canterbury. His Oxford D.Phil. on Canterbury's Anglo-Saxon charters was supervised by the incomparable Professor Dorothy Whitelock at Cambridge (the ancient universities' regulations yielded to the combined assault of two determined characters).

While still working on the D.Phil., Nicholas in 1964 was appointed to his first academic post, at the University of St Andrews. There he became

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an active member of the University's Archaeological Society, and was duly invited to chair a meeting at which the lecturer was J. K. S. St. Joseph, pioneer of the photography of historic landscapes from the air. Also in the audience was Chloë Willis. Over coffee, she and Nicholas were formally introduced, and, as they say, the rest is history. Their courtship was conducted on travels around Fife in Nicholas's Morris Minor, visiting Pictish inscribed stones. They were married in 1967 by Chloë's father, a broadminded churchman who was happy to omit the word 'obey'. 1969 was a memorable year for the young couple: their daughter Ebba was born and Nicholas's D.Phil. was completed. Their son Crispin was born in 1970. Between the ages of 3 and 11, Crispin's serious illness involved long hospital spells in London and Edinburgh. Through these difficult years, Chloë recalls, 'Nicholas was as solid as a rock'. Theirs was to be a marriage enduringly happy. As well as the 'hobby' Nicholas took up professionally, he and Chloë shared interests including walking and bridge. Nicholas developed an extensive knowledge of wild flowers, as well as becoming a keen gardener. With such enthusiasms, naturally, went cooking and jam-making.

When Nicholas was appointed to a lectureship in Medieval History at St Andrews in 1964 he joined a department which was in the process of being established as one of the foremost centres for teaching and research in Medieval History in the UK. Under the enlightened leadership of Lionel Butler, the department expanded rapidly to include an unparalleled number of medieval historians who taught a very diverse range of European and English medieval history topics. Nicholas's appointment meant that Anglo-Saxon history became an established part of the second-year lecture programme and honours options. Pre-Conquest studies became very popular with the increasing numbers of undergraduates who came over the Border, many of whom switched from other subjects to join this young and vibrant department teaching a branch of history relatively unknown and rarely taught in British schools.

It is difficult now to appreciate the impact of the exciting range of options which was opened up for increasing numbers of undergraduates in this period of university expansion. Of course 'Constitutional Documents' formed the core of honours teaching, in which Nicholas participated, but his courses 'The Age of Alfred', 'Early Christian Britain, Columba to Egbert' and 'Northumbria in the Age of Conversion' were topics which had never appeared in the honours syllabus before and which introduced undergraduates to the pre-Norman era and its resounding importance to our national history. In addition, he brought to his teaching

a novel interdisciplinary component. Courses entitled 'Place-Names and Settlement Problems in Dark Age and Viking England' and 'The Archaeology of the Medieval Town' appeared in the departmental curriculum and introduced students to the ancillary disciplines which are so important to a proper understanding of early medieval history. This marked the beginning of any concern with teaching medieval archaeology in St Andrews, and the current inclusion of archaeological topics in the School of History syllabus continues that pioneering approach and maintains an element of archaeological studies which have never succeeded in gaining a proper place as a separate discipline in that university.

An interest in local history and recognition of the importance of studying the material remains of place—which formed part of Nicholas's research wherever he studied and taught—were fully developed in St Andrews. In 1969 he carried out rescue excavations when rows of houses which lined Abbey Street were demolished to widen the main access road into the town from the south, close to where the earliest tenements in the twelfth-century burgh were located. With a colleague in the Geography Department he analysed the development of the town's layout in a definitive study of the origins of the ecclesiastical urban foundation of St Andrews, which remains the seminal publication.[1] Nicholas also became deeply involved in the conservation activities of the St Andrews Preservation Trust, and was a trustee between 1971 and 1984 and chairman from 1977 to 1979. It was during this period that he investigated the history and archaeology of 'St. John's House', next to the Department of Medieval History in South Street.

With Barbara Crawford as Director, the developing excavation programme of a late Norse settlement on the remote island of Papa Stour in Shetland greatly benefited from the participation of Nicholas and his family during two seasons in the late 1970s. The significance of discovering medieval house sites and linking this evidence with historical sources was the sort of intellectual challenge in which Nicholas revelled. He gave much sound advice on how to analyse and interpret the evidence. He was never backward in giving advice (sometimes portentously!) but always to good advantage.

Nicholas's intellectual understanding of document and place was enhanced by a delight in historical sites and landscape, which his students relished when taken on field trips, especially to the Anglo-Saxon treasure

[1] N. P. Brooks and G. Whittington, 'Planning and growth in the medieval Scottish burgh: the example of St Andrews', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, NS2 (1977), 278–95.

sites of Northumbria, and above all to his beloved pilgrimage place of Lindisfarne. It is these occasions which stay long in the memory of graduates and provide visual and personal experiences to enhance the study of document and text in the lecture theatre and seminar room. Nicholas was a master of both forms of teaching, and starting his teaching career in the ecclesiastical capital of Scotland gave him firm pedagogic foundations on which to build for the rest of his career.

The next phase of that career took Nicholas to Birmingham. It was a period of great fulfillment in his life, academic and personal.[2] The History Department was already a distinguished one, and Nicholas left it an outstanding one. His track record of research at St Andrews had ended by extending into the later medieval period with a highly original paper on the organisational network of the rebels in Kent and Essex during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381.[3] His move to a Chair at Birmingham naturally required an inaugural lecture, and Nicholas rose to the occasion with élan, combining intellectual substance with a high entertainment quotient, and a natural gift for communication. The medium was the message when the theme to be addressed was that of forgery across a wide sweep of time. It included a discussion of the likely identity of the perpetrator of 'Piltdown Man'.[4]

Changes in the research environment nationally inspired Nicholas and his colleagues to create a postgraduate research seminar. He encouraged his research students to attend the Leeds International Medieval Congress, founded in 1994. These annual forays, it was reliably reported, 'even took him on to the dance floor'. Nicholas relished the combination of intellectual cut-and-thrust with generous sociability. The Department's research profile was enhanced by the successes of Nicholas's students, a number of whom have gone on to academic careers. Conference organisation was another aspect of this research focus, and Nicholas strongly supported a series of conferences on urban themes, which spanned the centuries from late antiquity to early modernity, and were thoroughly interdisciplinary,

[2] For full details, see Christopher Dyer's account of 'Nicholas Brooks at Birmingham', in J. Barrow and A. Wareham (eds.), *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters. Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 11–14.

[3] N. P. Brooks, 'The organization and achievements of the peasants of Kent and Essex in 1381', in H. Mayr-Harting and R. I. Moore (eds.), *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. H. C. Davis* (London, 1985), pp. 247–70. (Reprinted in N. P. Brooks, *Communities and Warfare 700–1400* (London, 2000), pp. 266–89.)

[4] N. P. Brooks, *History and Myth, Forgery and Truth, Inaugural Lecture* (Birmingham, 1986). (Reprinted in N. P. Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths: State and Church 400–1066* (London, 2000), pp. 1–19.)

bringing historians, archaeologists and geographers into fruitful collaboration. Out of two such conferences, on 'Death in Towns' and 'Urban Decline', came publications that were both timely and path-breaking.[5] To yet another conference on the beginnings of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, Nicholas contributed two major and complementary papers on Kent and Mercia, subsequently published in a now classic volume.[6] For Nicholas, services to the university always included, besides teaching and research, administration. During his service as Dean of the Arts Faculty between 1992 and 1995, he continued to teach. He made recruitment to academic posts a high priority, and he was justifiably proud of the outcomes of the appointment committees he chaired.

Nicholas had been elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1989, and it was not long before he was applying his administrative talents and management experience to the important role of Chair of the British Academy/Royal Historical Society Anglo-Saxon Charters committee, of which more later in this memoir. For conferences associated with reappraisals of major Anglo-Saxon churchmen, Nicholas produced some of his finest work, not least on Archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury, Bishop Oswald of Worcester and Oswald's successor, Wulfstan. In this context, Nicholas signalled the importance of continental contacts. He was adept at luring the best specialists to these events, and at arranging for the publication of the papers in the series he edited originally for Leicester University Press as 'Studies in the Early History of Britain', and later for Ashgate as 'Studies in Early Medieval Britain'. It was not only these superb volumes but also the range and quality of the contributors involved that confirmed Nicholas's deserved reputation as a central figure in Anglo-Saxon scholarship in the UK and internationally.

Nicholas continued to work on themes that had long interested him, such as the history of Rochester Bridge, which led him to write in the Birmingham years about bridges in Europe, and the role of the state in sponsoring transport and construction.[7] A new interest was in the idea of ethnogenesis, pioneered by such continental colleagues as Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl, and, in the United States, by Patrick Geary. Nicholas, like Patrick Wormald, brought to the table distinctive work on the myths

[5] S. R. Bassett (ed.) *Death in Towns. Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100–1600* (Leicester, 1992); T. R. Slater (ed.) *Towns in Decline AD 100–1600* (Aldershot, 2000).

[6] N. P. Brooks, 'The creation and early structure of the kingdom of Kent', and 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', in S. R. Bassett (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (Leicester, 1989), pp. 55–74, 159–70. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths*, pp. 33–60, 61–77.)

[7] See below, p. 37, and n. 21.

surrounding, and realities underpinning, English identity.[8] The love of landscapes that Nicholas had acquired in Kent and during his years at Winchester and Oxford, and maintained at St Andrews, grew stronger still in the Birmingham environment where interdisciplinary research flourished in the hands of Steve Bassett, Chris Wickham and Chris Dyer, and place-names studies were stimulated by the presence of Margaret Gelling, a good and enduring friend.

Many researchers came to Birmingham because Nicholas was there, including Alicia Correa, Katy Cubitt, Julia Barrow and Susan Kelly, all of them enthused by various aspects of Anglo-Saxon history and its place in the medieval firmament. He, in turn, was always the first to acknowledge how much he learned from these younger scholars. For them, as for Nicholas himself, and for the rest of his colleagues, the Birmingham years were pervaded by a practice well established among the Anglo-Saxons: the exchange of gifts.

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Nicholas's interest in medieval history began early and proved life-long. The threads are easy to trace: for instance between Harold Walker's influence on the Winchester College schoolboy and three of Nicholas's published papers. All three were pioneering studies that are now deeply embedded in the literature, each a model for distinct strands of Anglo-Saxon scholarship. The genesis of the first can be dated to the summer of 1960, when the housemaster and his former pupil conducted a four-week tour of the defences listed in the early tenth-century document known as the Burghal Hidage. Their survey produced results of great value in connection with the burghs at Chisbury (in Little Bedwyn, Wiltshire), Sashes (a small island in the Thames, near Cookham, Berkshire) and *Eorpeburnan* (probably on the edge of Romney Marsh, Kent). In 1964, when he was still in the early stages of his graduate work at Oxford, Nicholas's first publication centred on these forts.[9] A second subject in which Harold Walker and Nicholas shared an interest was the Bayeux Tapestry. Both responded to its singular artistic skill and narrative power. In the late 1970s, in warm tribute to the inspiration of his old teacher and friend,

[8] N. P. Brooks, 'The English origin myth', first published in Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths*, pp. 78–89.

[9] N. P. Brooks, 'The unidentified forts of the Burghal Hidage', *Medieval Archaeology* 8 (1964), 74–90. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, pp. 93–113.)

Nicholas wrote a paper on the Bayeux Tapestry, and presented it to the inaugural 'Battle' conference on Anglo-Norman studies in 1977.[10]

The third focus of Nicholas's interest, Anglo-Saxon charters, which were to be the central, persisting and increasingly strong theme in his scholarship, can also be traced back to Winchester College. Among the school's archives is a group of four single-sheet documents written in the tenth and eleventh centuries. These documents came from the archives of the New Minster, later Hyde Abbey, Winchester, dissolved on Henry VIII's orders in 1539, and had been given to the school before the end of the sixteenth century. No doubt use had long been made of them there, for teaching purposes; and it is easy to see how Harold Walker might have made Nicholas aware of the challenges and opportunities presented by such material for the study of Anglo-Saxon history. His paper on the royal charter, dated 900, by which King Edward the Elder granted an estate at Micheldever, in Hampshire, to the New Minster, Winchester, was first published in 1982, as part of a volume celebrating Winchester College's sixth centenary. It reflects vividly the pleasure Nicholas took in identifying, walking and mapping the boundaries of (in this case) a group of pre-Conquest estates. It also reflects Nicholas's awareness of why and when religious houses turned to the fabrication of royal charters, before as well as after the Norman Conquest. This too was to recur as another strong theme in his writings.[11]

In 1962, Nicholas embarked on a D.Phil. thesis, entitled 'The Pre-Conquest Charters of Christ Church, Canterbury'. He was entering the field at a propitious moment, when the study of Anglo-Saxon charters was coming into its own, thanks above all to the work of Florence Harmer, Frank Stenton and Dorothy Whitelock. The emerging consensus was that diplomas (royal charters) in Latin were in decline by the end of the tenth century, and already in the process of being superseded by the more efficient form of document known as the writ. At stake, therefore, was the general understanding of the documentary culture before the Norman Conquest, with further important implications for the extent of continuity between Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman English government. In 1962, Nicholas knew only too well that he was committing himself to a project

[10] N. P. Brooks with H. E. Walker, 'The authority and interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 1 (1978), 1–34 and 191–9. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, pp. 175–218.)

[11] N. P. Brooks, 'The oldest document in the college archives: the Micheldever forgery', in R. Custance (ed.), *Winchester College: Sixth-Centenary Essays* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 189–228. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths*, pp. 239–74.)

of great size, multiple dimensions and bewildering complexity. He was delighted when it proved possible for him to have Professor Dorothy Whitelock as his supervisor, even though she had moved in 1957 from Oxford to Cambridge. Of course he also had the benefit of expert guidance in Oxford, where Pierre Chaplais was responsible for introducing students of English history to the finer points of diplomatic (the study of documents) across the Middle Ages. Chaplais's teaching in the early to mid-1960s was by all accounts exciting, and disconcerting. Among other reappraisals, Chaplais challenged and swept aside some of the most basic assumptions about the diplomas, and writs, of the Anglo-Saxon period, introducing new ways of regarding the documents themselves, and demonstrating above all else what could be learnt from focusing attention on the surviving 'originals'.[12]

Nicholas was soon immersed in the close examination of the physical characteristics and script of the large number of documents in the Christ Church archive which were preserved in their original single-sheet form; and at the same time he undertook a close analysis of the formulation of all documents surviving in any form, whether as originals, forgeries or copies in cartularies (collections in single volumes of copies of earlier charters), paying close attention at every stage to changing historical circumstances. His D.Phil. thesis, submitted in September 1968, bulging with maps and plates, represented an extraordinary advance across a wide field. Its greatest strength lay in its treatment of ninth-century charters, for which the material from Christ Church was so extensive and so varied. On the basis of this material, Nicholas was able to reconstruct the career of Archbishop Wulfred of Canterbury (802–32), and to explore the finer points of Kentish diplomatic across the ninth century as a whole. He was also able to demonstrate how standards of Latinity deteriorated at Canterbury in the third quarter of the century, to the point symbolised by a charter, dated 873, which appeared to have been written by a scribe whose knowledge of Latin and grasp of diplomatic were wholly unfit for purpose. Surprisingly (or perhaps significantly), there seemed to be relatively little to say about a continued process of endowment of Canterbury in the tenth and eleventh centuries, with the implication that successive kings had refocused their attention elsewhere. The story at Christ Church switched, therefore, to the circumstances in which a community of secular clergy came to be transformed, in the early years

[12] For further details, see R. Sharpe, 'Pierre Chaplais 1920–2006', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy* 11 (2012), pp. 115–50.

of the eleventh century, into a community of monks living according to the Rule of St Benedict, and how that community fared thereafter through a period of Scandinavian conquest, some further complications and then Norman Conquest.

Throughout Nicholas's years at St Andrews, his work on the Christ Church charters continued alongside his new responsibilities. In the 1970s he drew directly in several publications on material which had been central to his D.Phil. dissertation. For his contribution to a Festschrift for Dorothy Whitelock, published in 1971, he laid bare the development of military obligations across different kingdoms in eighth- and ninth-century England, showing why the diplomatic evidence had to be handled with due care and attention.[13] His wide-ranging review article on the study of Anglo-Saxon charters, written in the early 1970s, reflected the impact on him of the series of articles published by Chaplais in the 1960s. He was ready to entertain the possibility that charters came into use during the reign of Æthelberht, king of Kent (*c*.560–616); and since his own work had uncovered clear distinctions between the diplomatic traditions at Canterbury and at Rochester, especially for the eighth and ninth centuries, he wrote with authority about the need to study the diplomas of one archive in relation to those of another.[14] In a third paper, written for a conference on King Æthelred the Unready in 1978, he showed from the evidence of the vernacular wills and law-codes how heriot, payments owed to a king on the death of a member of the nobility, developed during the tenth and eleventh centuries, in response to changing times.[15] For those who might not have had the opportunity to read his doctoral dissertation, a fourth paper in this group was revelatory. The use he was able to make of the single-sheet diplomas from Christ Church made compelling evidence for the decline of Latinity at Canterbury in the third quarter of the ninth century; and quite apart from the way it sharpened understanding of one of the most familiar of all Anglo-Saxon texts, King Alfred's preface to his translation of Pope Gregory's *Regula pastoralis* (*c*.890), it

[13] N. P. Brooks, 'The development of military obligations in eighth- and ninth-century England', in P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (eds.), *England before the Conquest* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 69–84. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, pp. 32–47.)

[14] N. P. Brooks, 'Anglo-Saxon charters: the work of the last twenty years', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3 (1974), 211–31, at 215–20. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths*, pp. 181–202, at 185–91, with a Postscript on the period 1973–98, pp. 202–15.)

[15] N. P. Brooks, 'Arms, status and warfare in late-Saxon England', in D. Hill (ed.), *Ethelred the Unready* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 81–103. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, pp. 138–61.)

showed how the study of a group or a series of charters was able to add a new dimension to our knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon past.[16]

Amidst his duties at St Andrews, Nicholas worked also to complete what stands as his most important single contribution to the wide field of Anglo-Saxon studies. His monograph on *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066*, published in 1984, was based squarely on the D.Phil. thesis, but for the purposes of the book the subject was developed into the first detailed study of the history of a major religious house in Anglo-Saxon England. Nicholas's necessary starting point was an exemplary command of the available documentary material, while at the same time he made extensive use of a variety of other forms of evidence, their meanings expounded at every twist and turn in relation to wider historical contexts, and the whole account sustained across a period of nearly 500 years.[17] The significance of the book lay not least in the fact that Christ Church, Canterbury, was the house with the longest recorded history of any in the land, always at the centre of the story and often in the eye of the storm. In terms of the written record, Christ Church was shown to be an archive that presented challenges of its own.

There is an extraordinary abundance of material for the ninth century, when Canterbury was unquestionably in the key position at a crucial stage in the changing dynamics between the kingdoms south of the river Humber. There is not quite such good material for the tenth and eleventh centuries, which is significant in itself; yet what survives is still of a quality which would be the envy of those working on the documentation surviving from many other archives.

Curiously, much of Canterbury's story has to be read between the lines of the documents themselves, with rather less help than might have been expected from contemporary chronicles, saints' lives or 'local' histories. In every respect, however, Nicholas was able to demonstrate the importance of the 'archival' approach, that is, focusing on a single archive maintained, however unevenly, over a long period, which he had espoused from the outset, over twenty years before. It was his control of the material

[16] N. P. Brooks, 'England in the ninth century: the crucible of defeat', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th ser., 29 (1979), 1–20. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, pp. 48–68.)

[17] N. P. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (Leicester, 1984); see also N. P. Brooks, 'The Anglo-Saxon cathedral community, 597–1070', in P. Collinson, N. Ramsay and M. Sparks (eds.), *A History of Canterbury Cathedral* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 1–37. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths*, pp. 101–54.)

as a whole, in all its aspects, from the late sixth century to the twelfth, which enabled him to see the possibilities, to make the connections and to discern the patterns. He made all that he could from the extraordinary quantity of original pre-Conquest material; yet he was also able to appreciate how circumstances changed in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest, what impact this had at Canterbury on the treatment of its past, and why it was so important, therefore, to respect the archive's larger dimensions.

No less significant an aspect of Nicholas's book, from a historian's point of view, lay in its provision of a refreshingly different perspective across a long period: not that of a king on his throne, packaged by convention according to the duration of one reign after another, but that of a religious house, in a particular locality, set within a variety of other contexts. At Canterbury, the archbishops formed a continuous line of succession, supremely well placed by the nature and the prominence of their office to have played a significant part in influencing discussion at church councils and royal assemblies, or in standing firm whenever their own interests came under threat. Nicholas had been able to construct a picture of Archbishop Wulfred (802–32), in his struggles against the Mercian overlords, which was compelling precisely because it was so well grounded in the charters. Now he took the opportunity to look more closely at some of Wulfred's successors in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Dunstan, whether as abbot of Glastonbury (940–*c.*957) or archbishop of Canterbury (959–88), needed no introduction among the leaders of the monastic reform movement of the tenth century; yet Nicholas saw how much could be added to the picture (and in subsequent work would go on to make such additions).[18] Ælfric, archbishop of Canterbury (995–1005), representing the second generation of reformers, was less well known; and in this case Nicholas showed how after Ælfric's death the evidence for what was evidently a crucial period in the community's history was manipulated in a new context. In short, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury* brought home the importance of focusing attention on archbishops as significant players in their own right, and did so in ways which would apply *mutatis mutandis* to bishops and abbots, as well as to ealdormen and thegns, if only equivalent material had been available.

[18] N. P. Brooks, 'The career of St Dunstan', in N. J. Ramsay, M. Sparks and T. Tatton Brown (eds.), *St Dunstan: Life and Times* (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 1–22. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths*, pp. 155–80.)

Nicholas's point was, by implication, that stories were waiting to be told in respect of each and every religious house, whether the many for which less source material has chanced to survive (such as Abingdon, Bury St Edmunds, Glastonbury, Ely, St Albans, Westminster and York), or the two cathedral churches (Winchester and Worcester) for which an even greater quantity of material is available. In effect, a series of varied, complementary narratives would emerge, which, in combination, would help historians to break free from the straitjacket of received tradition. Different archives would present different challenges, and different opportunities; but much would always depend on command of each archive as a whole, and separately, spanning the period from foundation to the Domesday survey, and in some cases onwards from the twelfth century to the Reformation, or even beyond. This archive-by-archive approach had been adopted in 1966 at the first meeting of the British Academy/Royal Historical Society Joint Committee on Anglo-Saxon Charters. Nicholas himself endorsed it in principle. He joined the Committee in 1983, and served thereafter as its Chair from 1991 to 2013. But for the moment, the implementation of the approach, and its long-term implications, remained in the future.

Meanwhile, from 1985 to 2004, Nicholas was based in the University of Birmingham. In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Medieval History, delivered in January 1986, he enlarged for the benefit of a general audience on what was for him his role as a historian of Anglo-Saxon England. His natural habitat was the written word, whether 'literary' or 'documentary'; and in reading the available texts, originating between the seventh and the twelfth centuries, his aim was to consider the circumstances under which they had been written, to expose the purposes which they might have been intended to serve, and in this process to strip away 'myth' and reach towards any underlying truth. His wider interests ensured that he was eager at the same time to make effective use of any other forms of evidence available, including archaeology, architecture and numismatics. The 'myths' he had in mind ranged from the story or life imagined for a saint, or the history constructed for a religious house, to the connected past invented for a kingdom, or indeed the very notion of a unifying identity shared by the 'English people' as a whole. Among the saints who came under fresh scrutiny, in addition to Dunstan himself, were Ælfheah, archbishop of Canterbury (1006–12), and Wulfstan II, bishop of Worcester (1062–95). Nicholas explored in depth the origin of legends which developed for two of the major Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Kent and Mercia); and, on a more general level, he contributed extensively and from

various perspectives to the widening discussion of the emergence and promotion of an 'English' identity in the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries.

Nicholas's exploration of the contexts from which these themes emerged, and of the purposes which they served, went hand in hand with an abiding interest in the nuts and the bolts of early medieval societies. In collaboration with James Graham-Campbell, Nicholas set the late ninth-century hoard of silver coins and ingots found at Croydon, in Surrey, in the context of the Viking invasions of Alfred's kingdom in the early 870s. Documentary evidence in the form of the gospel-book known as the 'Codex Aureus' pointed towards Ealdorman Alfred and the community of Christ Church, Canterbury.[19] The millennium of the Battle of Maldon (991) provided an opportunity for relating knowledge of arms and armour to the famous poem on the event, seen as an indictment of the king's policy of sending troops into battle without the appropriate equipment.[20]

The document known as the Burghal Hidage was brought together with the evidence of charters, from Wessex and from Mercia, so that each form of evidence could illuminate the other.[21] The same interest in the workings of society suffused Nicholas's work on Rochester Bridge, where the pleasure derived from understanding how a knowledge of charters and local history helped to make sense of a document on the maintenance of the bridge itself, and where, fortuitously, the pleasure was greatly enhanced by the survival of the bridge itself, as a symbol of continuity from the deep-rooted practices of the past.[22] Nicholas was not one to underestimate the level of purpose or organisation which might lie behind the records. It is good to recall Nicholas's doing as full justice to the tactical skills of the peasants of Kent and Essex in 1381 as he did to the shrewd

[19] N. P. Brooks and J. A. Graham-Campbell, 'Reflections on the Viking-age silver hoard from Croydon, Surrey', in M. A. S. Blackburn (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Monetary History* (Leicester, 1986), pp. 91–110. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, pp. 69–91.)

[20] N. P. Brooks, 'Weapons and armour in The Battle of Maldon', in D. G. Scragg (ed.), *The Battle of Maldon* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 208–19. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, pp. 162–74.)

[21] N. P. Brooks, 'Alfredian government: the West Saxon inheritance', in T. Reuter (ed.), *Alfred the Great* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 153–73.

[22] N. P. Brooks, 'Rochester bridge, AD 43–1381', in W. N. Yates and J. M. Gibson (eds.), *Traffic and Politics: the Construction and Management of Rochester Bridge, AD 43–1993* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 1–40, 362–9. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, pp. 219–65.); and N. P. Brooks, 'Medieval European bridges: a window onto changing concepts of state power', *Journal of the Haskins Society*, 7 (1997 for 1995), pp. 11–29. (Reprinted in Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, pp. 1–31.)

amassing and management of resources, some six hundred years earlier, by kings and churchmen.

Nicholas took early retirement in 2004, after nearly twenty years as professor at Birmingham. Among the pleasant distractions in the years which followed was sharing with everyone else in the excitement generated by the discovery, in September 2009, of the so-called Staffordshire Hoard, now divided between three locations in the West Midlands (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery; The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent; and Lichfield Cathedral). Professional Anglo-Saxonists and members of the general public alike enjoyed opportunities for expounding views on the possible contexts for the hoard in the seventh and eighth centuries, for developing theories about the circumstances in which the material was formed and assembled, and the reasons why it might have been concealed for safe-keeping, by the side of Watling Street, in the heartland of the kingdom of the Mercians, and not recovered by those who buried it. At a symposium hastily convened at the British Museum, in March 2010, Nicholas took his cue from the fact that the hoard was overwhelmingly of warrior gear, and suggested that there might be a connection between it and the payments of heriots, so well attested in vernacular wills and law-codes of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and presumed to have existed in some form at an earlier period.[23]

Nicholas's major academic commitments in his retirement were twofold: the completion of his long-planned edition of the charters of Christ Church, Canterbury; and the delivery of a volume in *The New Oxford History of England*, covering the period from *c*.400 to *c*.850. It was noted above that Nicholas's work on the Christ Church charters had begun in 1962, and that, thanks to the co-operation between the British Academy and the Royal Historical Society, a joint committee of the two organisations was tasked with taking the matter further. Nicholas's mentor at Oxford, Pierre Chaplais, was among those in favour of the 'whole corpus' approach; Nicholas's Cambridge supervisor, Dorothy Whitelock, was among those opposed, on the grounds that funding and effort should be directed in the first instance towards the provision of modern editions of the Latin diplomas of the period 975–1066. It was decided to embark on a multi-volume edition of the corpus, and, most importantly, on an archive-by-archive basis, rather than a chronological one. In 1970 the

[23] The papers from the Staffordshire Hoard Symposium have been made available by the Portable Antiquities Scheme <https://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium> (accessed 11 April 2016).

committee invited Nicholas to produce an edition of the charters of Christ Church, Canterbury—a challenge which he was naturally quick to accept.

When the inaugural volume in the series, on the charters of Rochester, was published, in 1973, Nicholas expressed criticism, with good reason.[24] Each archive presented challenges as well as opportunities of its own; and although it had been established that the organising principle was to be 'archival', it also became increasingly apparent that the task was far from straightforward, whether because of the sheer size and complexity of the major archives, or because of the need, even for the editor of a small archive, to keep an eye on the corpus as a whole. Nicholas was responsible for initiating the annual symposium, at first as a way of encouraging active editors to share their problems with each other, and in due course as a forum for all those interested in charters as a form of evidence about the Anglo-Saxon period, providing an opportunity for graduate and post-doctoral students to join in. Nicholas grappled with rather than embraced the new technology, but he also understood from the outset that the electronic dimension was central to the project if its aims were to be fulfilled and if the subject was to prosper. He grappled just as vigorously and successfully with the technical requirements of the AHRB- (then AHRC-) funded Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England database, on whose International Advisory Board he sat, much to the project's benefit.

The pressures, demands and unavoidable distractions of a full-time academic career combined in the later 1980s, and throughout the 1990s, to prevent Nicholas from making as much progress as he would have liked on the completion of his edition of the Christ Church charters. In the late 1980s he was assisted in the establishment of working texts by Alicia Correa, and over a longer period, from 1997 to 2011, he worked in fruitful collaboration with Susan Kelly. As the edition progressed, Nicholas could not resist the temptation to enlarge separately on particular documents in various stimulating papers. He examined with relish the charter by which Archbishop Wulfred had established a constitution for the community at Christ Church, in the early ninth century; and he dwelt on the special interest of a lease in the name of Archbishop Æthelnoth, not least as evidence that in Cnut's reign the minster at Reculver was in the hands of a small community of monks from the Low Countries.[25] This is a striking

[24] N. P. Brooks, 'Review of A. Campbell, *Anglo-Saxon Charters I: the Charters of Rochester*', *English Historical Review*, 90 (1975), 626–7.

[25] N. P. Brooks, 'Was cathedral reform at Christ Church Canterbury in the early ninth century of continental inspiration?', in H. Sauer and J. Story (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent, Essays in Anglo-Saxon Studies* 3 (Tempe, AZ, 2011), pp. 303–22; and N. P. Brooks,

example of the many continental connections that crop up frequently in Nicholas's oeuvre. He displayed great imagination as well as formidable learning in showing how particular documents can illuminate much larger historical issues: a lesson he had learnt many years before at Winchester College.

After fifty years in the making, the monumental two-volume edition of the Christ Church charters, amounting in total to over 1,200 pages, was published in September 2013.[26] All those present on the occasion will recall Nicholas's obvious delight when the first bound copies were delivered to the British Academy during the annual symposium on Anglo-Saxon Charters, held on 18 September, as well as their own pleasure on first handling an edition which they would soon be able to use for purposes of their own. In the preface to the first volume Nicholas pays tribute to the indispensable contribution made by Susan Kelly, especially in respect of the texts themselves, and the detailed commentaries. The two volumes also represent the outcome of Nicholas's vision, in the early 1960s, which had led him to produce a remarkable D.Phil. thesis in 1968, and which led in turn to his groundbreaking monograph of 1984. The volumes are the product of collaborative work sustained over a long period. They mark arrival at the half-way point (that is, half-way through the corpus of surviving charters) for a project to which Nicholas was deeply committed. They constitute both an empyrean monument to the Anglo-Saxon scholarship Nicholas personified, and, more prosaically, a huge resource to all the many who follow in his path.

For Nicholas, publication of the edition of the Christ Church charters represented the achievement of an objective to which he had been committed since his days as a doctoral student. His other major task was the projected volume in The New Oxford History commissioned by Oxford University Press in 1990, and intended to provide a new perspective on the ground covered in the earlier chapters of Frank Stenton's *Anglo-Saxon England* (1943), in the older series. This was a daunting task, to say the least; and no doubt it was in Nicholas's mind as he took new opportunities to explore wider issues. Most Anglo-Saxonists would probably agree that the title applied by modern scholarship to the composite text known as the 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' is as misleading in its implication of

'The Archbishop of Canterbury and the so-called introduction of knight-service into England', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 34 (2012), 41–62.

[26] N. P. Brooks and S. E. Kelly (eds.), *The Charters of Christ Church, Canterbury*, 2 vols., (Oxford, 2013); N. P. Brooks, 'The early charters of Canterbury Cathedral', *British Academy Review*, 24 (2014), 38–41.

uniform authority as it is helpful for the sake of convenience. But if it is now generally taken for granted (as once it was not) that the Chronicle originated in 'Alfredian' court circles, and was first 'published' in the early 890s, debate has continued about the manner of its continuation and transmission across the tenth and eleventh centuries, and into the twelfth. When an elaborate plan was hatched, in the early 1980s, for a new multi-volume edition, glorying (it was thought with good reason) in the complications of the text, Nicholas was among those quick to express their reservations.[27] At conferences in 2009 he put forward a suggestion that cut to the heart of the matter. He proposed, quite simply, and, not coincidentally, by analogy with Frankish equivalents, that the annals for the tenth and eleventh centuries were written at and circulated from the centre, perhaps by royal priests; and he suggested, therefore, that a more appropriate name for the composite text would be the 'Old English Royal Annals'. The suggestion may prove to be too radical; for while most would agree that the familiar title conventionally applied to the composite work is a misnomer, for several reasons, the designation of these annals as necessarily or uniformly 'royal' is no less problematic. It may be that the community of Anglo-Saxonists will continue, for a while at least, to live with the familiar title. At a conference in 2010, convened in Rochester to celebrate the *Textus Roffensis*, he gave a paper on another text which he hoped would be fundamental to his Oxford volume, also written in the spirit of making an issue of a subject which had for too long been taken for granted. He suggested the possibility that the laws of Æthelberht, king of Kent, had been codified in some form before the arrival of St Augustine and his fellow missionaries, in 597, and that the surviving text, produced under the auspices of the missionaries, represented the adaptation of an earlier law-code, compiled by the king's pagan priests, written in runic script.

Foundational in a field that Nicholas emphatically considered British, not just English, were the thirty volumes of Studies in the Early History of Britain (later Studies in Early Medieval Britain), published between 1982 and 2009 under his general editorial guidance, four of them under his personal editorship or co-editorship: *Latin and the Vernacular Languages in Early Medieval Britain* (1982), *St Oswald of Worcester* (1996), *St Wulfstan and his World* (2006) and *Early Medieval Studies in*

[27] 'This scheme verges on the foolhardy'. N. P. Brooks, 'Review of S. Taylor, D. Dumville and S. Keynes, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition*', *English Historical Review*, 101 (1986), 472.

Memory of Patrick Wormald (2009). Of the last, though Nicholas said 'it had been an honour to help steer a … 33-ship convoy … into the haven of publication', he declined naming as a co-editor. That was characteristic of the man. But so was the whole series, and its purpose in giving expression to the voices of so many younger scholars and to so many collaborative ventures, with Nicholas as backroom boy. It is to be hoped that the two volumes of Nicholas's collected papers, published in 2000, will be supplemented in due course by a third volume, comprising those papers published between 2001 and 2015. They show that he was at the height of his powers; and with the edition behind him, he was poised to move on.

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There are two stories of Nicholas's retirement, both true. One is that he spent more time with Chloë and the family (which by now included three grandchildren), that he continued to enjoy garden-work, and walking in landscapes British and continental, that he and Chloë found new enjoyment (yet this too he had enjoyed of old in his parents' home) in choral singing, and that he spent more time in bridge-playing than bridge archaeology. The other is that after a final spurt, he held in his hands the two volumes of the Canterbury charters; that he also published several substantial and highly original papers, including the two on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; that he continued to supervise research students; that he regularly attended Section meetings at the Academy; that until 2013 he continued to chair the Charters Committee; and he continued to sit, as he had since the 1990s, on the Fabric Advisory Committees of two great cathedrals, Canterbury and Worcester. Like the Anglo-Saxon king he most admired, Nicholas 'left his memory in good works'. He died on 2 February 2014.

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Note. The authors would like to thank Ann Kettle for additional information on the St Andrews years. We are especially grateful to Chloë Brooks for sharing her memories of Nicholas, and to her and her family for supplying photographs for the online

version of this Memoir. There is a full list of Nicholas's publications to 2006 in J. Barrow and A. Wareham (eds.), *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters. Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 249–54. These include all publications reprinted in *Communities and Warfare 700–1400* (London, 2000) and *Anglo-Saxon Myths; State and Church 400–1066* (London, 2000). Nicholas's main publications after 2006 are:

N. P. Brooks, 'The Fonthill Letter, Ealdorman Ordlaf and Anglo-Saxon law in practice', in S. Baxter, C. Karkov, J. L. Nelson and D. Pelteret (eds.), *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 301–17.

N. P. Brooks, 'Was cathedral reform at Christ Church Canterbury in the early ninth century of continental inspiration?', in H. Sauer and J. Story (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent*, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon Studies 3* (Tempe, AZ, 2011), pp. 303–22.

N. P. Brooks, 'Why is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about kings?', *Anglo-Saxon England* 39 (2011), pp. 43–70.

N. P. Brooks, '"Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" or "Old English Royal Annals"?', in J. L. Nelson and S. Reynolds with S. M. Johns (eds.), *Gender and Historiography: Studies in the Earlier Middle Ages in Honour of Pauline Stafford* (London, 2012), pp. 35–48.

N. P. Brooks, 'The Archbishop of Canterbury and the so-called introduction of knight-service into England', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 34 (2012), 41–62.

N. P. Brooks, 'Treason in Essex in the 990s: the Case of Æthelric of Bocking', in G. R. Owen-Crocker and B. W. Schneider (eds.), *Royal Authority in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 17–27.

N. P. Brooks, *St Ælfheah (St Alphege) from Deerhurst to Martyrdom (1012): Some Millennial Reflections on Religious Ideals*, Deerhurst Lecture 2012 (Deerhurst, 2014).

N. P. Brooks, 'The laws of King Æthelberht of Kent: preservation, content, and composition', in B. O'Brien and B. Bombi (eds.), *Textus Roffensis: Law, Language, and Libraries in Early Medieval England* (Turnhout, 2015), pp. 105–36.

Plate

1964 or 1965: Nicholas directing excavations at Wallingford, Oxfordshire.

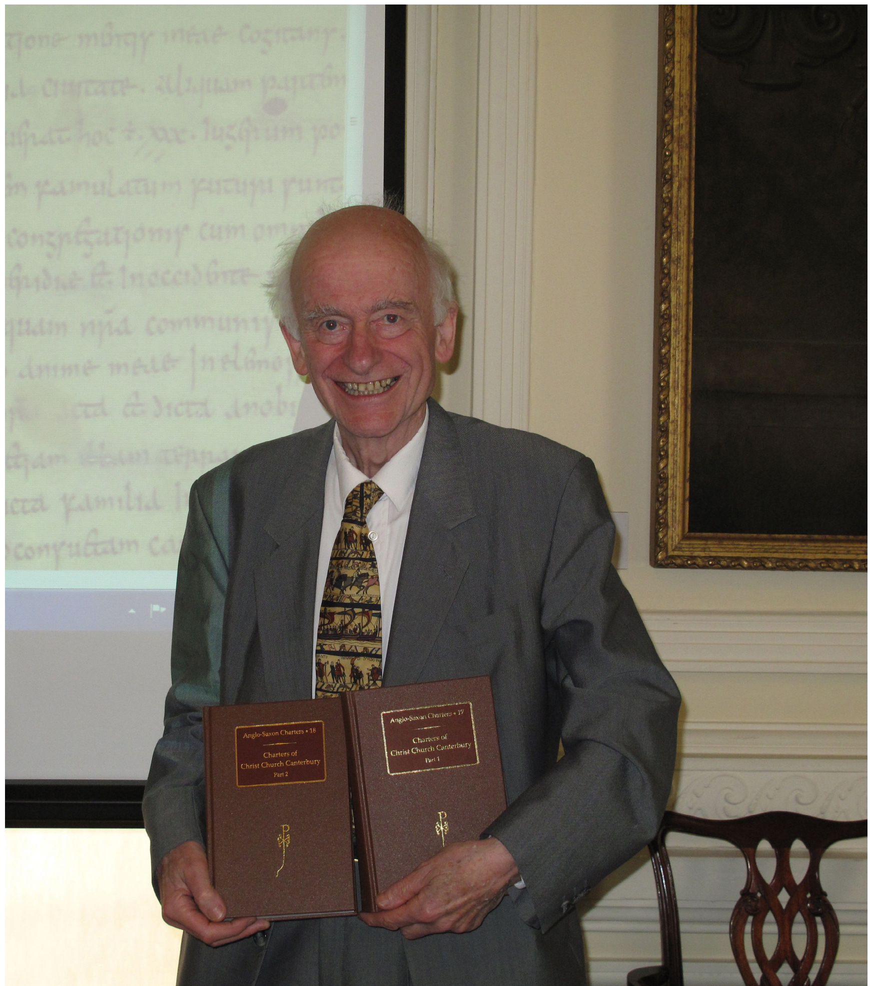
2001: Nicholas at the annual Settimane di Studi sull'alto medioevo conference at Spoleto, Umbria, with Jill Mann FBA and Michael Lapidge FBA.

Plate

2010: Nicholas exploring the remains of an Orkneys broch.

Circa 2010: Nicholas the bridge-enthusiast in front of the suspension-bridge across the Thames at Marlow, Buckinghamshire.

Plate



2013: Nicholas at the British Academy on the day of the Anglo-Saxon Charters Symposium celebrating the launch of the two volumes of the Canterbury charters.